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# GRAFT

A Comedy in Four Acts

BY

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE



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STRAND

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G R A F T





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"

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# GRAFT

## A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

### PERSONS REPRESENTED

JIM PILLING . . . . .	<i>A Gardener.</i>
SALLY PILLING . . . . .	<i>His Wife.</i>
DICK PILLING . . . . .	<i>Their Child.</i>
WALTER MONTGOMERY . . . . .	<i>A Curate.</i>
STEPHEN VERITY . . . . .	<i>An Alderman.</i>
ERNEST SMITHSON } . . . . .	<i>Town Councillors.</i>
SAMUEL BAMFORD }	
NATHANIEL ALCORN . . . . .	<i>Borough Surveyor.</i>
ARCHIBALD VINING } . . . . .	<i>Of the Polygon.</i>
AUGUSTUS MONTGOMERY }	
MRS. VINING }	
MRS. MONTGOMERY }	
MARJORIE VINING }	
LUCY VERITY . . . . .	<i>Stephen's Daughter.</i>
A CHAUFFEUR.	
JANET . . . . .	<i>Lucy's Maid.</i>
MAID AT MRS. VINING'S HOUSE.	
A MAN AND HIS WIFE in search of lodgings.	

*The Scene is laid in a Northern manufacturing town at the present time.*

## GRAFT

First produced, under the title of "The Polygon," by the Play Actors' Society at the Court Theatre, London, on February 5, 1911, with the following cast:—

JIM PILLING . . . . .	<i>Mr. H. K. Aylyff.</i>
SALLY PILLING . . . . .	<i>Miss Lorna Lawrence.</i>
DICK PILLING . . . . .	<i>Miss Ida Mansfield.</i>
WALTER MONTGOMERY . . . . .	<i>Mr. Frank Randell.</i>
STEPHEN VERITY . . . . .	<i>Mr. Herbert Bunston.</i>
ERNEST SMITHSON . . . . .	<i>Mr. Alfred Harris.</i>
SAMUEL BAMFORD . . . . .	<i>Mr. Fewlass Llewellyn.</i>
NATHANIEL ALCORN . . . . .	<i>Mr. James Geldred.</i>
ARCHIBALD VINING . . . . .	<i>Mr. Allan Jeayes.</i>
AUGUSTUS MONTGOMERY . . . . .	<i>Mr. Hugh Tabberer.</i>
MRS. VINING . . . . .	<i>Miss Lucy Sibley.</i>
MRS. MONTGOMERY . . . . .	<i>Miss Caroline Fenton.</i>
LUCY VERITY . . . . .	<i>Miss Kitty Carew.</i>
CHAUFFEUR . . . . .	<i>Mr. Wyn Weaver.</i>
JANET . . . . .	<i>Miss Constance Little.</i>
MAID . . . . .	<i>Miss Irene Malvesyn.</i>
MAN . . . . .	<i>Mr. Alfred Bristowe.</i>

*Produced by Miss Rose Mathews.*



Cast of the production by Miss Horniman's Company at  
the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, on September 9, 1912.

DICK PILLING . . . . .	<i>Mabel Salkeld.</i>
SALLY PILLING . . . . .	<i>Miss Irene Rooke.</i>
JIM PILLING . . . . .	<i>Frank Darch.</i>
WALTER MONTGOMERY . . . . .	<i>Milton Rosmer.</i>
STEPHEN VERITY . . . . .	<i>Edward Landor.</i>
A CHAUFFEUR . . . . .	<i>Arthur Milton.</i>
A MAN . . . . .	<i>Reginald W. Fry.</i>
HIS WIFE . . . . .	<i>Doris Bateman.</i>
LUCY VERITY . . . . .	<i>Sybil Thorndike.</i>
JANET . . . . .	<i>Doris Bateman.</i>
NATHANIEL ALCORN . . . . .	<i>Lionel Briggs.</i>
SAMUEL BAMFORD . . . . .	<i>Ernest Bodkin.</i>
ERNEST SMITHSON . . . . .	<i>H. A. Young.</i>
ARCHIBALD VINING . . . . .	<i>Brember Wills.</i>
AUGUSTUS MONTGOMERY . . . . .	<i>Ernest Haines.</i>
MRS. VINING . . . . .	<i>Hilda Sims.</i>
MRS. MONTGOMERY . . . . .	<i>Annie Moller.</i>
MARJORIE VINING . . . . .	<i>Muriel Stewart.</i>
MAID . . . . .	<i>Marie Royter.</i>

Produced by Mr. Lewis Casson, by whom this acting  
edition was prepared.

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## GRAFT

### ACT I

*A small room on the first floor, awkwardly overcrowded with the entire furniture of a cottage, a pile of which is stacked in the left corner and covered with a sheet; the plain iron bed is right, the window coming between its foot and the pile of furniture; table centre; three plain upright chairs and one wicker armchair before the fire; fireplace left; opposite it right a kitchen dresser well stocked with crockery; pans and kettle about the fireplace. For all the uncomfortable crowding the room is bright and well kept. Door right. It is 7 p.m. on a September evening, and the approach of dusk is noticed gradually.*

**JIM PILLING**, a gardener, has finished tea and sits in his shirt-sleeves before the débris of the meal facing spectator lighting a briar pipe. **JIM** is thirty, clean looking, dressed in his rough working clothes without coat or his combined collar and "dicky" and red tie, which hangs with the coat behind the door. **SALLY PILLING** is transferring the last of the table utensils to a tray which she puts on the bed; then removing the white cloth and shaking crumbs into the fire; a red cloth is underneath. **SALLY** is of the pale complexion usual to a country girl living in a town; she dresses neatly and has an apron on; **DICK**, a thin boy of eight, in a blue sailor suit, gets off his chair at the table.

DICK. Can I go out and play now, mother?

(JIM rises and crosses L. with chair.)

SALLY. Yes. (She crosses to door and takes down from a hook his sailor hat.) Here's your hat. (DICK comes to her; she secures it on his head with an elastic band.) Don't go far from the door, Dick. I'll shout you when it's bedtime.

JIM. And don't get playing in the road—keep on the footpath.

DICK. Yes, dad. (He runs out as SALLY opens the door.)

SALLY. Don't get run over now.

JIM. The young 'un misses the country. (Sits in armchair above fire.)

SALLY (closing door). We all do that, Jim.

JIM. Aye. Streets are no sort of playground for a growing child. Did you get out while he was at school this afternoon?

SALLY (gathering up tea-things). Oh, yes. There's not the cleaning to do in a single room to keep me in it all day.

JIM. No; better for you to get out a bit.

SALLY (dully). It's no pleasure walking in the streets.

JIM. Not when there's shops to look at?

SALLY. You can get tired of shops. (Tea-things on tray.)

JIM. You're no true woman.

SALLY. I'm no town's woman. (Crosses to JIM.) I miss the flowers and the green. I'm pining for the country, Jim.

JIM. And I'm same way, only I do get the smell of the earth in Mr. Vining's garden and it's not so bad for me.

SALLY (wistfully standing above his chair). I'd dearly love to see that garden, Jim.

JIM. I know you would; but they're that strict

about the Polygon. No getting in unless you've business.

SALLY. It does seem hard when there's not a park nor so much as a blade of grass in the whole blessed town except the Polygon. (*Puts tray on bed.*)

JIM. The old days were the best, Sally, on the estate where we were born.

SALLY. We didn't know it, either, till Sir Charles began to sack his men.

JIM. No; many a time I've grumbled at the work there and the pay. It's a judgment on me.

SALLY. You weren't sacked for grumbling. (*Shaking cloth in fire.*)

JIM (*bitterly*). No. I was sacked because Sir Charles lost so much money on the turf he couldn't keep six gardeners any longer—and me the one to go because we'd only our Dick and t'others had more childer.

SALLY (*mildly surprised at his tone*). Gentlemen will have their sport, Jim. It might be worse. You dropped lucky into a job. (*Folds cloth and puts in dresser drawer.*)

JIM. Aye, the job's all right, and Mr. Vining's a good gentleman to work for—pay's better than the country an' all, though I can't get stuff to thrive in Mr. Vining's garden as I'd wish. (*Rises.*) Town air kills 'em. Yes, we'd do all right, Sally, if (*looking round the room as if caged*)—if there was room to live. That's what we want—room to live. We've our sticks for a proper house eating their heads off in yon corner (*indicating the pile*), and I've wages enough to pay rent for a house and no one 'ull take it from me. There's not a house to let in all Carrington, nor like to be but what there's plenty waiting for it before our turn come, and we've waited three years now.

SALLY (*consoling him*). Never mind, Jim. We've got our privacy. We've a room to ourselves.

(*She crosses to cupboard, gets work out and puts on table.*)

JIM (*hotly*). A room! One room! (*Cooling.*) Aye, but you're right. Let's be thankful for small mercies. (*Sits.*) I mind it looked like we shouldn't even find a room when we came seeking. But it's hard to live decent in here, and it's harder on Dick than us. Eat and sleep an' all in one room's not a Christian way of life.

(*A knock at the door. SALLY opens it. WALTER MONTGOMERY stands without. He is a curate, twenty-eight years old, athletic in build, clean-shaven, with a bright manner and a strong jaw.*)

WALTER. May I come in? Good evening, Mrs. Pilling.

SALLY. Surely, sir.

(*Enter WALTER. SALLY closes the door, adroitly taking her apron off as she does so and hanging it up. JIM makes for his coat.*)

WALTER. Good evening, Mr. Pilling. (*Seeing his objective.*) You're all right as you are.

JIM. Shirt-sleeves don't seem respectful, sir.

WALTER (*genially*). Rubbish. It's a pity if you can't be cool in your own room.

JIM (*apologetically*). The fire does make it hot in here.

SALLY. And we must have a fire to boil the kettle, sir.

(*WALTER looks at the closed window, but, having experience, makes no suggestion. JIM knocks his pipe out on the fire-bar.*)

WALTER (*seeing him, but too late to stop him*). Oh, don't do that—here, try a pipe of mine. (*Delving in his coat tails for pouch and offering it.*)

JIM (*shyly*). Well, sir—

WALTER. Go on, man. (*JIM accepts and fills his pouch; SALLY dusts a chair with the corner of the table cloth.*) Now you know that chair didn't need

dusting, Mrs. Pilling. (*He sits.*) Well, how's the garden, Mr. Pilling?

JIM. Oh, nicely, sir, nicely.

WALTER. Yes. So I thought when I had a look at it over the hedge. (*Turning to SALLY.*) I live next door to Mr. Vining, you know, Mrs. Pilling.

SALLY. Oh, but he can't get the garden to suit him, sir. (*Sits R. of table.*)

WALTER. Oh! How's that?

JIM. Thanks. (*Returning pouch. WALTER fills a pipe and lights up.*) This air's ruination to a garden, sir.

WALTER. You put up a jolly good fight against it, then. My father's garden looks pretty mean compared with yours.

JIM (*shyly*). Well, sir, you see, your father will try and look after his himself.

WALTER. Yes. He's awfully attached to his garden.

JIM (*with a touch of patronage*). And he doesn't do it badly—for an amateur, as you might say, but—well, he makes mistakes.

SALLY (*protestingly*). Jim!

WALTER. Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Pilling. Dick keeping well?

SALLY (*formally*). Oh, yes, thank you, sir.

WALTER. I saw him outside as I came in. I fancied the little chap looked pale.

JIM (*gravely*). He does look pale.

WALTER. Anything the matter?

JIM. No, sir, no . . . only this.

WALTER (*vaguely*). This?

JIM. This room—living in one room and nothing but streets to run about in.

SALLY. You can't keep a child inside, sir. 'Tisn't natural. The streets if it's fine and the stairs when it's wet out.

WALTER. None too safe, Mrs. Pilling, either of 'em.

SALLY. But what are you to do?

WALTER (*hopelessly*). Nothing, I suppose.

JIM. Folks can't thrive cramped up the way we are. If garden-stuff won't go in the air, it can't be good for humans.

(*A knock at the door. Without waiting for SALLY, who starts towards door, STEPHEN VERITY enters. He is fifty, iron grey, with a good deal of iron in his composition, though just now concerned more with the velvet glove than the mailed fist. A self-made man, he is cynical, domineering, dryly humorous at times, an ugly customer if crossed, with a strong jaw and tightly closed lips. Dressed in morning coat and grey trousers with very square toed boots, turned down collar, black tie. His coat is good solid broadcloth, but the cut is palpably local.*)

STEPHEN (*off*). Are ye in, Pilling? (*He enters and sees WALTER. SALLY and WALTER rise—grimacing at WALTER.*) Oh! (*He stops short in doorway.*)

JIM (*with deference nicely regulated some degrees lower than that he showed WALTER*). Come in, Mr. Verity.

WALTER (*holding out hand*). How do you do, Mr. Verity?

STE. (*shaking hands and speaking with laboured politeness*). How do you do, Mr. Montgomery? (*Dropping his hand—sneeringly.*)

(*He appropriates the wicker chair. WALTER sits edgeways on the table.*)

I didn't expect to find you here. What are you doing? Looking after their souls?

WALTER (*pleasantly*). I dropped in for a chat and a smoke, before going on to keep my appointment at your house. What are you doing? (*Sits L. of table.*)



STE. I'm looking after their bodies, only some of them won't see it. Pilling's a tough nut to crack.

WALTER. Not gathered him in yet?

STE. No, but I shall. He's one of your flock. It takes time to get hold of these fellows who come in from the country, (*spitefully*) where the squire and the parson spell omnipotence. He'll change his tune yet, though.

JIM (*shaking his head*). I'm not the changing sort.

STE. (*confidently*). You will be. A year or two more of this room and you'll be ripe for anything.

SALLY (*lifting the tray*). We're ripe now for a change from this.

STE. Don't go, Mrs. Pilling.

SALLY. I can get my turn at the sink for washing up now.

STE. That can wait. I want to ask you something.

SALLY (*replacing the tray*). Yes, sir? (*Sits R. of table.*)

STE. (*after brief pause*). Well, now, Mrs. Pilling, what would you say we need most in Carrington?

SALLY (*promptly*). Fresh air.

STE. You've hit the nail on the head. Trust a woman to be sensible when health's at stake. I've a piece of news for you. There's talk of getting a recreation ground for Carrington.

WALTER (*interested—sincerely*). Indeed! I hadn't heard. It's a most interesting thing.

JIM. And about time too. (*Sits below fire.*)

STE. (*sentimentalizing*). Yes, you'll be able to take Mrs. Pilling down for a stroll on a summer's evening or a Sunday afternoon and watch little Dick play about on the soft grass breathing the fresh air and fancying yourselves back in the country again. No need to have Dick running about in the streets then.

JIM (*curtly*). When?

STE. Well, nothing's settled yet, of course. I'm bringing it up at the next Council meeting and I've

a backing on both sides. Alderman Verity's a power in Carrington, I don't mind telling you.

JIM. I don't know about your power, sir. What I'm wondering is how it 'ull strike my boss.

WALTER. It sounds excellent.

JIM (*suspiciously*). And where might your land be, Mr. Verity?

STE. Ah, that's a secret yet.

JIM. Um. Recreation ground two mile away's no use to my lad and you'll not find land nearer.

STE. It'll not be five minutes from your door.

(WALTER *turns interestedly from one to the other.*)

JIM. Then you'll have to burrow for it or hang it in the air.

STE. No, we shan't. The land we have in view's built on at present.

JIM. Lots of good that 'ull do—turning people out of house and home to make a playing field, when houses are so scarce an' all.

WALTER. Yes. To my mind it's more housing accommodation that's most urgent here, Mr. Verity.

STE. We'll get neither without we're helped. There'll be a lot of opposition.

WALTER. Surely not.

STE. Oh, yes, there will. We Progressives can't carry anything in the Council unless there's a big force of public opinion at our backs.

WALTER (*confidently*). You won't lack that if you've a practicable plan.

STE. (*hotly*). Practicable! Nothing ever is practicable to some folk that means spending public money and putting up the rates. They're too short-sighted to see that a healthy town pays best in the end.

WALTER (*reasonably*). Still, such things as rates have to be considered, I suppose.

STE. (*hotly*). Oh, yes. Consider the purses of the ratepayers and consider the health of the people and

the danger of little children playing in the street and ask your religion which consideration weighs heaviest.

WALTER (*a little warmly*). Really, Mr. Verity, I needn't consult my religion. My common sense is sufficient to put me on your side—if you really are right in believing there can be two sides to such a question.

STE. Don't you make any doubt about that. There'll be two sides right enough.

WALTER. Well, can *I* do anything? Will you accept my help?

STE. Yes, yours—and yours, Pilling, and every man's who'll say a word for us.

(*A motor horn heard violently below the window—a few masculine curses and feminine shrieks—which SALLY echoes as she leaps to window and puts it up.*)

SALLY. Dick's in the street. (*She flies across from window and out at door.*)

STE. (*with the air of a conjuror*). There you are! Street accident.

(*JIM follows SALLY, but is met at the door by a very irate taxi-cabman carrying DICK in one hand and by the slack of his trousers, followed by SALLY. The CHAUFFEUR is a Cockney, about thirty, clean shaven, with the usual oily pallid complexion—dark—with black leather leggings and a bottle green great-coat with red facings. His number is on an enamelled plate, which is reversed.*)

JIM (*with more threat than anxiety*). Have you hurt him?

CHAUFFEUR. 'Urt? Nah. Aw'm a hexpert droiver, aw am.

(*He puts DICK on his feet. DICK seeks refuge behind his mother's skirts and pulls at them with one hand, curiously watching the CHAUFFEUR all the time.*)

PILLING *takes jug from washstand R. and exit for water.*)

Pulled up in foive yard. Bet it ain't no bloomin' fault of 'is 'es not 'urt.

SALLY (*threateningly*). If you'd killed my boy I'd have——

CHAUFF. (*interrupting*). Cheese it, missus. 'E's only frightened.

DICK. I'm not hurt, mother.

CHAUFF. No, bet yer would be if yer got what yer bloomin' well arsked for. Yer came as near to it as bone is to flesh.

(SALLY *sits on stool R, with DICK, examining his bruised knee.*)

STE. (*stepping forward pompously*). Now then, my man——

CHAUFF. Aw'm not yer man. (*To SALLY.*) Nah aw' give yer warning, missus, to look after 'im.

(JIM *returns with water, which he puts by SALLY R. She washes the knee.*)

WALTER (*quietly*). Isn't it your business to look after the safety of pedestrians?

CHAUFF. (*acknowledging the Church by a quieter reply*). What roight 'ad 'e to be in the middle of the rowd? Ain't the poivement woide enough for 'im to ply 'opscotch? (*He addresses WALTER.*)

JIM (R). Look here, that's my kid, and if you've anything to say you can say it to me.

CHAUFF. Aw've this to sy. Yer tell 'im to keep to the poivements. 'E moight 'ave bin in 'eaven nah if aw wasn't a hexpert droiver. There's more kids to the square foot in this tahn than any place aw've struck. People moike a fair 'obby of it.

STE. (*importantly*). You'd better be careful what you say. You don't know who you're talking to.

CHAUFF. (*with infinite scorn*). Fat lot aw care.

Yer nothing but a crowd of dead-aloiive provincials. Don't suppose yer ever saw a taxi-keb till me and my mate come dahn from London. A 'ackney keb is news to yer in these parts. (*Up to STEPHEN.*)

STE. (*boiling over*). I'm an alderman of this town and if you don't talk to me respectfully I'll have your license cancelled. You're not fit to have one.

CHAUFF. Ho! Blimey, not fit to 'ave a license, ain't aw? Aw've druv a dook in my keb. And yer a tahn councillor, are yer? Yus. Yer bloomin' well look it and aw can't say wuss than that.

STE. I'll pay you out for this. I'll report you to your employer.

CHAUFF. (*indignantly*). Employer be blowed. Aw'm my own boss. Bought my keb, aw did. That's enterprise. Don't know what enterprise means dahn here, do yer?

STE. What's your number? I'll report you to the police. (*Goes to window and looks out.*)

CHAUFF. Yus, yer do. Aw'll tell yer where 'e is. On the 'Igh Street with a stopwatch in his fat hand, trying to cop me exceedin' the limit, and aw've never druv above ten moile for fear of the kids.

(*JIM goes up to door.*)

STE. I demand to know your number.

CHAUFF. (*making sure that it is reversed*). Never you moind my number. My name's Walker. Fair fed up with this tahn, aw am. Aw'm used to drivin' gentlemen. Aw druv a bally commercial abart all yesterday and the blighter tipped me tuppence.

(*JIM indicates door.*)

Yes. Aw'm going. My keb 'ull carry me to London now (*moves a bit towards door*), and yer rowds reek of kids. Aw've killed none yet and aw don't want to. Aw reckon 'oss kebs are good enough for Carrington. P'raps they train 'em to step loightly

on the kids or else they're funeral 'osses in their spare toime and never learn to go faster.

STE. (*almost frenzied*). You . . . insolent . . . Cockney . . . cad.

CHAUFF. (*crossing back to STEPHEN*). Foine language from a tahn alderman with the Church lookin' on an' all. Aw am among the nob's. Abart toime aw cleared when a tahn 'as a bally hobject the loikes of you for an alderman. Aw wouldn't be seen droiving yer not for a quid a moile and disinfectin' free.

(STEPHEN *looks pugnacious*. WALTER *steps between them*.)

WALTER. If you're going to London, *Mr. Walker*—I think you said *Walker*—hadn't you better go?

CHAUFF. (*at door*). Yus, and aw'll droive quick for once through Carrington and charnce it. The kids 'ad better look aloive. (*Looking back at STEPHEN*.) Aw'll tell 'em when aw droive into the old garage in the Westminster Rowd abaht meetin' a real loive alderman. They'll be sending rand from Fleet Street to interview me abaht it.

(*Exit CHAUFFEUR, leaving door open*.)

JIM (*closing door—to WALTER*). I'm sorry you've been spoken to like that in my room, sir. Civil tongues don't cost nothing.

WALTER (*smiling*). That's a type of modern progress. The new man, *Mr. Pilling*.

JIM. Then I'd as lief have the old.

STE. That's where you're wrong, *Jim Pilling*. This fellow's up-to-date. He'd never be content to let his children play in the streets. He'd—

JIM. No. He'd drive over them.

DICK (*who's been clutching SALLY'S skirts, staring*). Boo hoo!

(*SALLY bends down*.)

STE. (*all ostentatious sympathy*). What's to do?

DICK. My knee's hurting. (*Holding it up.*)  
I falled on it.

SALLY (*examining it*). It's only bruised.

JIM (*looking at the knee*). Got any plaster?

SALLY. I think so. (*Opens drawer in the dresser and searches.*) I ought to have.

JIM (*watches her*). What's that?

SALLY. That's no good. Corn plaster. There's Beecher's Pills and Wood's Sarsaperilla and every mortal thing except the one you want.

WALTER (*reprovingly*). Patent medicines, Mrs. Pilling. (*Back to fire.*)

(DICK on stool, watching SALLY.)

SALLY (*justifying herself*). They've all got the Government stamp, sir.

STE. (*who has taken out a pocket book, eyeing DICK with what he thinks is benevolence*). I generally have some plaster in my pocket. (*But he looks in vain.*) No, none there. Sorry, Mrs. Pilling.

SALLY. I'd better take him to the chemist's. (*She gets a purse from the dresser.*)

DICK. Don't want no chemists. Want my supper.

SALLY. You'll have your supper when we get back. Come and see the man who lives behind the big red bottles.

(DICK consents to go. Exeunt SALLY and DICK.)

STE. (*triumphantly*). Anybody got anything to say against a recreation ground *now*.

WALTER. Neither of us ever had, I hope.

STE. You'd a lot to say about the rates.

JIM. And I didn't see the use of pulling houses down to make room where houses are scarce.

STE. We shan't pull down many.

JIM. It'll be a small ground then. (*Sits R. of table.*)

STE. (*with quiet triumph*). About ten acres.

JIM. You'll have to pull down streets on streets to find ten acres.

STE. We shall pull down just five houses. (*Sits L. of table.*) No more and no less.

JIM. Five houses!

WALTER (*startled*). Five, Mr. Verity?

STE. (*with bluster*). Yes. Five houses, I said.

WALTER (*puzzled*). Then you must be thinking of—oh, but that's ridiculous.

STE. And why is it ridiculous, Mr. Montgomery?

WALTER. The Polygon's the only place that applies to.

STE. Well, why shouldn't I be thinking of the Polygon?

WALTER. Are you?

STE. Yes.

WALTER. But the Polygon is——

STE. (*interrupting*). I'll tell you what the Polygon is.

WALTER (*quietly*). It's my home, Mr. Verity.

STE. (*with gusto*). Yes, it's the home of the leisured and privileged class of Carrington. It's five big houses with a kind of a square of tennis lawn in the middle of them and a great big garden behind each. It's the only apology for a breathing space we have and it's bang in the middle of the town. You've got great gates to it marked "private" and a lodge keeper to watch 'em and see none of the common herd get in to soil your sacred air by breathing it in their vulgar lungs. It's a shame and a scandal for the land to be wasted on you and it's not going to be wasted much longer.

WALTER (*without passion*). To the people who live there, it's——

STE. (*interrupting*). They're about twenty all told. Who are they to get in the way of the thousands that live crowded up like rabbits outside?

WALTER. They happen to be able to afford it, Mr. Verity.



STE. (*sarcastically*). Yes. They're well-to-do, so they've the right to monopolize the air.

WALTER (*mildly*). Yes, yes. But you do put things so violently.

STE. (*glancing at JIM for approval*). I feel 'em violently.

WALTER (*half apologetically*). You must remember this is quite a new idea to me, and for the moment it seems iconoclastic, if you don't mind my saying so.

STE. (*sneering*). Yes. Like all your class, you don't like new ideas. I'll say nothing about your Church, though that don't like new things either.

(JIM rises.)

WALTER. If you'll only give me a moment to think, Mr. Verity. . . . I'm trying my best to see the matter from your standpoint. Meantime, I don't know that you'll improve things by fulminating against the Church.

STE. (*blustering*). I shan't do myself any good by truckling to it, either. The Church was here before I was. It was here when Carrington was a little village and it's stood by and let the place grow into one huge slum. If we waited for the Church to give us a lead, we'd wait for all eternity.

WALTER (*smiling*). But you're not addressing the Church, you know. You're addressing a young and humble member of it.

STE. You're all tarred with the same brush.

WALTER. Not so black as our cloth, I hope. Some of us younger men try to be social reformers.

STE. Yes. It's all very pretty and romantic, but when it comes to anything that touches you personally like this does you're as bad as the greediest tithe grabbing pluralist that ever robbed a starving farmer of his—

JIM (*touching STEPHEN'S arm*). Mr. Verity, I'm a man that's slow to anger. But I've this to tell you. Mr. Montgomery's a clergyman and you're saying

things to him that aren't proper to be said and that I'll not have said in my room. (*Shrewdly.*) And you're not going the right way to get my vote for your recreation ground either.

STE. (*alarmed*). I apologize, Pilling. (*Rises.*)

JIM (*satisfied*). Ah!

STE. (*earnestly*). It's the wrongs of your class. I think of others, Pilling. I see what the motorman saw—streets crowded with little children, growing up in the gutter, playing in the dust—I can't help it. My tongue runs away with me when I think of it all.

WALTER. Say no more, Mr. Verity. You're probably right about the Polygon. I dare say we are out of place there, but you couldn't expect me to take your view the moment it's sprung on me.

STE. (*nodding*). I've a way of calling a spade a spade.

(*A knock at the door. JIM opens it. A MAN advances a foot into the room. Behind him is dimly seen a woman, both poorly dressed. The MAN has a bundle tied up into a blue quilt on his shoulder; his voice is tired and hopeless.*)

MAN. Have you got any floor space to let in this room, mate?

JIM. No. (*Trying to close the door. The MAN'S foot keeps it open.*)

MAN. Don't shut the door in our face. I've got the money to pay for it. I'll give you a week's rent now.

JIM. It's no use. I'm not letting.

MAN (*pleading*). I'm in work, mate. Start at Bamford's factory o' Monday. A corner's all as we want.

JIM. I tell you I've none to let.

MAN. Don't be so hard on a fellow. I can't get in nowhere.

JIM. You'll not get in here.

MAN (*turning dejectedly*). Lodging-houses full up and getting late an' all. We've been looking all day.

JIM (*closes the door*). Get three or four of them a week. They find room somewhere in the end.

WALTER. What did he want? Floor space?

(STEPHEN *crosses L.*)

JIM. Aye. Lots of rooms about here with two or three families in 'em. Some one 'ull take them in if they look long enough.

WALTER. I know. It's appalling.

STE. And ten acres in the Polygon with only five houses on 'em. (*Sits in armchair.*)

WALTER. All the more reason to build houses there and not waste it in playing fields.

STE. Ah! So it *is* wasted now?

WALTER. Yes. It's wasted now. I'm going to do my best to help you. (*Back to fire standing.*)

STE. That's good news, any way.

WALTER. Don't count on me for much. But what I can do I will. I'm afraid I must go now. I've a call to make before I'm due at your house.

STE. Right. See you later.

WALTER (*to JIM*). Say good-night to Mrs. Pilling for me. (*Crossing R.*)

(JIM *opens the door as WALTER goes out.*)

Good-night.

STE. (*rubbing his hands together*). Ah, glad I came. Good thing to rope in young Montgomery.

JIM (*sourly*). Good, is it?

STE. What else do you call it?

JIM (*aggressively*). Look here, Mr. Verity, you've been coming here calling yourself my friend. I knew well enough it was my vote you were after. Bless you, I don't mind. I know what even the *real* gentry 'ull do to get a man's vote. I've seen Sir Charles himself

stand'by and watch his wife kiss our Dick at election time. But I've finished with you now. You'll come here no more after this. (*Above table L.*)

STE. (*staggered*). But . . . I don't understand. What have I done? (*Rises.*)

JIM. It's not what you've done. It's what you're wanting to do.

STE. I'm wanting to provide a recreation ground for Dick to play in. Anything wrong in that?

JIM. A lot. There's more important things than playing fields.

STE. Oh, you're thinking of Montgomery's idea for houses.

JIM. No, I'm not thinking of anybody's ideas. Thinking of ideas leads to mischief. I'm thinking of my bread and butter that you're taking from me.

STE. I?

JIM. You know very well where I work.

STE. You're Mr. Vining's gardener, aren't you?

JIM. Yes, and Mr. Vining lives in the Polygon. It's likely I'd vote for breaking up the Polygon, isn't it?

STE. But, my dear friend—

JIM. I tell you I'm not your friend.

STE. Mr. Vining will have to live somewhere. He won't cease to require a gardener.

JIM. Ever hear tell as a bird in the hand whacked two in the bush?

STE. (*scornfully*). If you're afraid of losing your employment.

JIM (*with conviction*). A working man's always afraid of that. I know what it's like to be out of a job.

STE. (*ingratiatingly, after a slight pause*). Well, now, I tell you what.

JIM. Aye?

STE. We shall want somebody to look after the grass in the recreation ground.

JIM. Well?

STE. The Park Committee will want an experienced gardener—like you.

JIM. Are you offering me the job?

STE. Yes.

JIM. How do you know you'll be on any Park Committee? You might be fired out of the Council next November.

STE. (*with dignity*). I'm an alderman, Pilling. Aldermen stay in, they don't get fired.

JIM. You're offering me this. Well and good. And what about all the other folk as find work in the Polygon? House servants and such like.

STE. The residents won't cease to want servants where they move to.

JIM. And you can flit servants same as furniture, can't you? And servants haven't votes and I have. So you bribe me and they can go to the devil.

STE. (*backing in alarm*). Mr. Pilling!

JIM. Oh, I'm not blind, if I was brought up in the country. They didn't learn me there to vote against my master, either. I take Mr. Vining's money and—

STE. But man alive, how's he to know which way you vote? The ballot's secret.

JIM (*sceptically*). Oh, aye, we've heard that tale before.

STE. (*irritated*). But it *is* secret.

JIM (*unconvinced*). That's what they tell you. And if it is, it's not secret from me. *I'd* know how I voted. And I couldn't hold out my hand for wages from a man when I'd voted opposite to him. I'm not built that way.

STE. (*disgustedly*). Jim Pilling, I thought you'd more sense.

JIM. I've a sense of right and wrong.

STE. Yes, the sense that your employer's always right.

JIM. It makes no matter if he's right or wrong. He's still my employer. A man can't vote against

the gentleman that gives him bread and butter, and Mr. Vining's a *real* gentleman, mind you. (*With enthusiastic admiration*). I never saw him raise his hand to do a thing himself yet.

STE. You're a fool, Pilling.

JIM. I'm an honest fool, then.

STE. Look here, if you won't take it from me, will you take it from Mr. Montgomery?

JIM. I don't know. He's a young 'un. More like a man than a parson. Coming in here and smoking his pipe like you might do yourself.

STE. But he is a parson—young Montgomery.

JIM (*grudgingly*). Aye. He's a man I trust.

STE. Then if he tells you, will you vote for turning the Polygon into a playing ground?

JIM (*confidently*). He won't.

STE. But if he does?

JIM. I'll see.

(*Re-enter SALLY and DICK.*)

STE. Hullo! Patched the little man up?

SALLY. Yes.

(*DICK exhibits a black plaster about his knee.*)

STE. I'll get out of your way, Mrs. Pilling. I've an appointment to keep at home. Good-night. (*Crosses below table to door.*)

SALLY, } Good-night.  
JIM. }

STE. (*turning at door, patting DICK's head*). Good-night, Dick.

(*DICK doesn't respond. Exit STEPHEN.*)

SALLY. Good riddance and all. Now, Dick, you ought to have been in bed long ago. (*Takes DICK up to bed.*)

DICK. Can't I come and watch you wash up?

SALLY. No, you can't. (*She begins to undress him.*)

DICK. I want my supper.

SALLY. You can have it in bed.

JIM. You don't like Verity, lass?

SALLY. And never did. What's he want with bothering round week after week? We're not his class.

JIM. Vote's what he's after, and it's a marvel to me what they will do for votes.

SALLY. You'll do yourself no good with him, Jim.

JIM. I'm thinking so myself. He's a bit too keen on this recreation ground, Verity is. Been putting himself about something extraordinary. (*Crosses to fireplace, taking pipe.*) I fancy, you know, there's something behind all this.

*(The undressing of DICK advances.)*

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

STEPHEN VERITY'S *dining-room the same evening.*  
*The room has doors right and left. Window with drawn blind, R. Large table centre with chairs. Fireplace left. Solid-looking sideboard back centre. The furniture is solid, old-fashioned, and the atmosphere of the room is one of heavy comfort without ostentation. The room is a small one. No books anywhere. In an armchair before the fire is STEPHEN VERITY. WALTER MONTGOMERY faces him in a highbacked chair. STEPHEN is smoking a large, well coloured briar.*

STEPHEN (*removing the pipe*). So you think you're good enough to marry my daughter, do you?

WALTER. I ventured to think so.

STE. Why?

WALTER. Because I love her, Mr. Verity.

STE. That the only reason?

WALTER. No.

STE. What are the others?

WALTER. She loves me.

STE. Did she tell you so?

WALTER. Yes.

STE. Um! (*Slight pause ; he smokes reflectively.*)  
That all?

WALTER (*rather startled*). All what?

STE. All your reasons.

WALTER. Yes, I think so.

STE. They're too few.

WALTER. But——



STE. I'll ask *you* something.

WALTER. Yes?

STE. What do you want to get married for?

WALTER. I'm in love.

STE. That's no reason. You curates, you're all alike—must be with marrying other folk so much. Infectious, I reckon. Church ought to be scheduled along with the other dangerous trades.

WALTER. You're laughing at me.

STE. No, I'm not. Marriage isn't a laughing matter, I know.

WALTER. Won't you give me your answer, Mr. Verity?

STE. Yes. (*He rises, knocks at his pipe in the grate, puts it on the mantelpiece and goes himself to the door left. His deliberate movements cause WALTER an agony, of which STEPHEN is quite aware. STEPHEN opens the door and calls.*) Lucy!

LUCY (*off L.*). Yes.

STE. Come in here. (*He leaves the door open and goes below door. Enter LUCY VERITY. She is twenty-one, pretty, dressed in a skirt and blouse, pointing to a very modest dress allowance. Her hair is plainly dressed. Obviously her father is her master, but she is not without indications of a will of her own. WALTER rises as she enters.*) Here's a friend of yours. Tells me he wants to marry you.

(LUCY crosses R. of table.)

LUCY (*anxiously*). Yes, father.

STE. It's true, then? (*Motions her to sit.*)

LUCY. Yes. (*Sits R. of table.*)

STE. Well, listen to me. He's a curate. Curates always marry young and have enormous families on no income. (*WALTER makes an attempt to protest; STEPHEN proceeds unmoved.*) I advise you not to marry him. If he wants a wife, he'll not go begging one for long. There's always crowds of silly girls ready to help a chap to button his collar behind.

WALTER. Mr. Verity, this isn't a joke to us.

STE. I don't know that losing Lucy 'ud be a joke to me.

WALTER. I can very well believe that. But it's a thing that's bound to come to you sooner or later.

STE. You're making a mistake. It isn't bound to come at all. My daughter's no need to find a man to keep her. She's a head on her shoulders and sense enough to know when she's well off. Who's going to look after my house if Lucy marries? Tell me that, young man.

WALTER. I really haven't thought about it, Mr. Verity.

STE. And I'm not going to.

WALTER. There'd be plenty of time to consider that. We're not proposing to get married to-morrow.

STE. 'Um. Very good of you. Want a long engagement, eh?

WALTER. Moderately.

STE. And hope I'll be dead and out of your way first? (*Sitting behind table c.*)

LUCY. Father!

STE. You hold your tongue. I'll get you to talk in a minute. (*To WALTER.*) What do you want to wait for?

WALTER. I'm hoping to get a living before long.

STE. So you *have* proposed on nothing a year. I thought as much.

WALTER (*with excessive dignity*). I'm not without money, sir. I could afford to marry at once.

STE. Could you now? And what might you call being not without money?

WALTER. I've £150 a year.

STE. You plutocrat! Lucy, do you hear that? He's £150 a year. Nice sort of marrying income, that is. Oh, but perhaps I'm wronging you. What's your father going to do for you when you marry?

WALTER. I don't know. I haven't asked him.

STE. Well, give a guess at it.

WALTER. Nothing, probably. He gave me an expensive education.

STE. Then he made a bad investment if it's only worth £150 a year to you to-day. I had *no* education and I'm worth—well, never mind. Lucy, tell him what I've been telling you to-night.

LUCY. What you told me?

STE. Don't repeat my words like a fool. Go on. You've got your chance of talking now.

LUCY. But—

STE. So like a woman to be backward at tongue-wagging, isn't it?

LUCY (*as if repeating a lesson*). You told me that mother left me money which you've increased by investment till it's now capable of yielding £1,000 a year, and since my twenty-first birthday a week ago the money lies to my credit at the bank.

STE. That's right. Now, my gallant £3 a weeker, what have you got to say to that?

WALTER. Of course I didn't know.

STE. No. I'll gamble you didn't. You fancied I lived in a small house because I couldn't afford a big 'un. That's a regular Polygon notion. You're used to their way of living up to your income and as much beyond as you've pluck for. When a man's worked as hard as I have he don't spend as fast as he earns. He sticks to what he's got.

WALTER. I knew you were a successful man, sir.

STE. I've made my way. I began low and I'm no class now, bar what they think of me at the bank—and that's a fat lot more than they think of any fine Polygon gentlemen. Would you like to know where Lucy's bit comes from?

WALTER. Really, I'm—

STE. Her grandfather kept the *Black Bull*. That's where it was made, except what I've added to it. Stinks of beer, that money does. Pubs were

a good thing in his time for a landlord that kept off the drink.

WALTER. I've no doubt it was honestly made.

STE. Aye, ye *would* think that now you fancy your chance of fingering it. It was made in the way of business same as my own was, and that means the best man won and he hadn't time to stand still and think about honesty. Too busy downing the other fellow for that. And now you've got it. That's me, sir, builder and contractor, and married a publican's daughter. Feeling as keen set on Lucy as you were?

WALTER. I don't believe very much in artificial class distinctions, Mr. Verity.

STE. Don't you? Not in your business hours, you mean. Not so long as you remember you're a parson.

LUCY. Father! (*Rises.*)

STE. Well, what's the matter with you? Do you want to marry him?

LUCY. Yes.

STE. You're a fool. You've £1,000 a year. You're an heiress. He's a pauper.

WALTER. I'm not a pauper, but I quite agree. From the worldly point of view——

STE. It's the only view I care about. (*To LUCY.*) With your money you can look high.

LUCY. Thanks, father. When I want to buy a husband, I'll let you know. I'm thinking of marrying one at present.

STE. (*immensely surprised*). Hullo! Showing spirit, are you? (*Rises.*)

LUCY. It's the first time, if I am.

STE. And it had better be the last, if you don't want to quarrel. I'm not one of these weak-kneed modern fathers that let themselves be browbeaten by their own children. Perhaps you think you'll get him whether I consent or not?

LUCY. I hope you will consent. (*Pause.*)

STE. I'm not fond of curates, Lucy. It's a soft job, and a real man looks for a fighting chance in life.

WALTER. I get plenty of fighting to do, Mr. Verity.

STE. Who do you fight with?

WALTER. Evil, in every shape and form.

STE. 'Um, the devil's game for a few rounds yet.

WALTER. He's an old hand, and if we haven't knocked him out we're weakening his defence.

STE. Well, I'll give you a chance of showing it.

WALTER. In a good cause, I hope.

STE. The cause is all right. You're a parson. Got the good of the poor at heart and all that sort of thing?

WALTER. I hope so.

STE. Yes. (*Briskly.*) Well now, about Lucy.

WALTER. Is that the fight?

STE. I'm coming to the fight. You say you love her.

WALTER. I do. (*STEPHEN is between them.*)

STE. (*to LUCY.*) You love him?

LUCY. Yes. (*LUCY R., STEPHEN C., WALTER L.*)

STE. (*holding up his hands evenly.*) Quits so far. Income on the male side £150 a year. (*Surveys his right hand.*) Income on the female side £1,000. (*Depressing his left hand as if weighing the incomes in scales.*) Hullo! wo! something wrong there. Doesn't balance.

WALTER (*bitterly*). Do you think I don't know it?

STE. (*dropping his hands*). Yes. You've hooked your fish, my boy. But you're a long way off landing her yet.

WALTER. Tell me what you want me to do.

STE. (*curtly*). Earn her.

WALTER. Yes, but how? (*Steps forward.*)

STE. By fighting. By doing something for the good of the town. There's this proposal to buy up the Polygon.

WALTER (*eagerly*). Yes?

STE. Well, now you know what you've to do. You know what Polygon people are and you know what the town needs.

WALTER. The town needs space and decent houses.

STE. That's what you've to rub into your Polygon set, and you'll not find 'em seeing it so easy.

WALTER. You can't blame them if they don't exactly welcome the idea of turning out and making fresh homes in their old age. It's only natural.

STE. Oh, I'm not afraid of them. They'll not stop us. All you've to do is to make them see they're an obstacle to progress in this town. They're bound to see justice if they are narrow and selfish and too puffed up with pride to know the townspeople and—

WALTER. And they're my father and my friends, Mr. Verity.

STE. Yes, I knew you only disbelieved in class distinctions during business hours. Scratch the curate and find the hypocrite.

WALTER (*keeping his temper smilingly*). As bad as all that?

STE. The moment I attack your class you're up in arms to defend 'em.

WALTER. No. They take up too much room in the Polygon. I never said they didn't. But they'll not want to go. And surely the whole thing depends on Sir Charles' readiness to sell.

STE. Yes, but a willing Polygon will make a lot of difference, and if you want Lucy as bad as you say, here's your way to help yourself to her.

WALTER. I don't see what Lucy has to do with it.

STE. Don't you?

WALTER. Well, do you? The town proposes to buy the Polygon for the people. It's an excellent project and my plain duty is to further it. I shan't fail in my duty merely because of the unpleasant unheaval in the lives of a few people who happen to be dear to me.

STE. Oh! Well, I don't want words, I want deeds. Succeed and I'll think about calling you son-in-law—if Lucy doesn't change her mind meantime.

WALTER. I can't see why you insist on making a kind of bribe of Lucy when there's only one course open to me in any case.

STE. (*grimly*). I'm making sure of things.

LUCY. Father, you don't doubt—

STE. I always doubt an untried man. I doubt if he'll have the pluck to face old Vining in the Polygon—I doubt lots of things. Put it that I'm giving him some Dutch courage to stiffen his back.

WALTER (*desperately*). I don't want Dutch courage. Is there any way of convincing you that I mean what I say?

STE. There's going and doing it.

WALTER. Very well, I will. (*Moving as if to go.*)

STE. (*stopping him*). Remember, you're not engaged to Lucy yet.

WALTER. I understand. (*Crosses R.*)

STE. That'll do, then. You know what you've to do. Good-night.

WALTER. Yes. Good-night, Mr. Verity.

(*LUCY moves towards right door.*)

STE. (*to LUCY*). You stay where you are. Say good-night to him while I've got my eye on you. He can find the front door without your help.

(*LUCY and WALTER shake hands, R.*)

WALTER. Good-night.

(*Exit WALTER, R. A slight pause. STEPHEN eyes LUCY from head to foot before speaking. LUCY crosses and sits L. of table.*)

STE. (*before fire, judicially*). It strikes me pretty forcibly I've brought a fool into the world. (*Sharply.*) How long's this been going on behind my back?

LUCY (*with an air of standing up to him*). Nothing's

gone on behind your back. I told Walter at once he must speak to you.

STE. Umph! If you'd told me you wanted help to send him about his business there'd have been some sense in it. But you backed him up. You showed fight. You're getting proud, my girl.

LUCY. I've grown up, father.

STE. Grown up, have you? All right. If you fancy you're too old to come to me for advice you can do without.

LUCY. You know I want your advice.

STE. So as you can do opposite, eh?

LUCY. Oh, that's unjust, father. I never disobeyed you in my life.

STE. And you'd better not begin now, or you and I will fall out. Ha! So you're grown up, are you? Yes, you've been a legal woman for a week. Only I've been a legal man for thirty years and you'll allow I know the world better than you.

LUCY. Of course.

STE. Oh, you do agree to that, do you?

LUCY. Certainly.

STE. Well, I tell you you'll be throwing yourself away on young Montgomery. (*Persuasively.*) He's not up to your weight, Lucy. Polygon type, he is. You know, shove all your goods in the shop window. Live in a big house for swank and get it dirt cheap because the neighbourhood's gone down. They're not solid. Lucy, you and I together could buy up the whole crowd of swells to-morrow.

LUCY. I fell in love with Walter before I knew I'd a penny piece in the world. I don't think my money must make any difference.

STE. Don't be silly. Money makes all differences. We're all born without pockets. It's pockets or no pockets that makes us rich or poor. Yesterday you didn't know you'd a pocket and the Polygon looked big and young Montgomery, he looked big. I don't blame you. It looked a good thing.



LUCY looks It the same to-day as it did yesterday.

STE. Women are fools over money. I did think you'd more sense. (*Dogmatically.*) Money should marry money. (*With rising irritation.*) It's all my eye to talk of throwing away your money on a penniless curate.

LUCY (*rises*). I'm sorry to disagree. Obedience has its limits. I hope we shan't quarrel, father, but I'm a free woman now and I warn you—oh, I'm sorry.

STE. Sorry, are you? I'm a hard man, Lucy. I'm a masterful man. I know that. But I'm a soft-hearted fool where you're concerned, or I'd let you marry the curate and suffer the consequences. But I've got ambitions for you if you've none for yourself. (*R.C.*) When you marry there's two things for it—money or birth—and you'll not find either in Polygon. They're a bad imitation of the real thing—about as near as the shoddy Bamford makes it to honest broadcloth. Not one of them with a handle to his name. (*Crosses to LUCY.*) If you must get married, I'll find you a husband. Leave it to me. And don't be in such a hurry to leave your old dad if you are a free woman.

LUCY (*quietly*). I'm marrying Walter Montgomery, father; but we're not in any hurry.

STE. Going to be obstinate, are you? All right. We'll see who'll win.

LUCY. You've already given a conditional consent.

STE. Don't you worry about that. He may help to keep the Polygon set quiet till I've put the business through.

(*Puts ink on table from sideboard.*)

LUCY. You'd use him and then throw him over afterwards. Father, you don't mean that!

STE. What do you know about business? I'd use the devil himself if I thought he'd smooth my way to a bit of money.

LUCY. But this isn't money, is it? It's for the town.

STE. Oh, yes, of course, it's the town.

LUCY. Then you'd——

(JANET, *the maid*, opens the door right to STEPHEN'S obvious relief.)

JANET. Mr. Bamford, Mr. Alcorn.

STE. Ah, that's what I'm waiting for. Don't go beyond call, Lucy. I'll be wanting you soon.

(Exit LUCY L.)

(Enter, R., BAMFORD and ALCORN.)

(SAMUEL BAMFORD is a wealthy shoddy manufacturer. He is a bachelor of forty, a bon vivant and a sportsman. His shrewd ruddy face shows above a white four-in-hand scarf, controlled by a horseshoe gold pin. He is well covered with flesh, but not yet as gross as he probably will be in a few years. His clothes are slightly sportsmanlike in cut and he wears spats. A noticeably heavy gold chain crosses his stomach. NATHANIEL ALCORN is tall, spare and dark. His face is yellowish, with a drooping moustache. He wears a frock coat, and his prosperity, though evident, is less ostentatious than BAMFORD'S.)

STE. Good-evening, gentlemen. (To JANET.) Send Mr. Smithson up when he comes. No one else.

JANET. Yes, sir. (Exit JANET.)

ALCORN (*briskly*). Evening, Verity.

(BAMFORD nods bluffly at STEPHEN.)

STE. Sit down. Any news?

(STEPHEN sits c. above table, BAMFORD R. and ALCORN L. of table.)

ALCORN (*producing letter from his pocket*). Yes, my brother's sent this on. (*Hands letter to STEPHEN*.) From Sir Charles' agent. He's abroad, Sir Charles.

BAMFORD. Yes, confound him. How dare he be abroad when we want him?

(STEPHEN reads the letter.)

STE. (*looking up*). Dodging duns. (To BAMFORD.) You've seen this?

BAMFORD (*gloomily*). Yes.

ALCORN (*equally gloomily*). It's not encouraging.

STE. (*returning the letter to ALCORN*). What isn't encouraging?

ALCORN. Why, this. (*Reading the letter*.) "Speaking for myself alone, I consider it extremely improbable that Sir Charles will consent to a sale of the Polygon to your company." (*Leaves letter on the table*.)

STE. There's nothing to be afraid of there.

ALCORN. I don't know so much about that. These land owning fellows know they're no good at business. They leave it to their agents, and if the agent writes like that, you can take it he knows.

STE. He knows all right. Sir Charles isn't a business man, but his agent is. If there's a chance of selling, that agent wants a top price; naturally he writes that way to bluff us into raising our offer.

BAMFORD. You've a head on your shoulders, Verity.

STE. (*to BAMFORD*). It all depends on what you told us. If your information's correct, they'll be only too glad to sell.

ALCORN. Yes. It's you that told us Sir Charles is in low water.

BAMFORD. He's dropped a pot of money lately. It's a well known fact. I know one bookie that's taken ten thousand off him in the season, and he's not the only one.

ALCORN (*sanctimoniously*). Deplorable wastrel.

STE. Eh? Oh, aye! (*Ironically*.) Lamentable prodigality. Shocking extravagance, isn't it, Alcorn?

But it suits our book. The faster he goes the pace the better for us, so you might as well be decently grateful instead of getting mealy mouthed over it.

BAMFORD. Me and Alcorn were arguing coming along here what's to be done with the land.

ALCORN. Aye, but as I told him, the first thing is to get possession of the land.

STE. Now, don't you worry about that, Alcorn. The land's as good as ours at our own price. Sir Charles 'ull jump at it.

BAMFORD. Well, I'm for building on it.

ALCORN. And I'm not so sure.

BAMFORD. Of course you're on my side, Verity?

STE. Your side?

BAMFORD. For building.

STE. No.

BAMFORD. What, and you a builder!

STE. I've finished building now. I'm getting old. I've made my money.

ALCORN. I'm out for making an open space of it.

BAMFORD. You're a blooming philanthropist.

STE. No, he's not. It's a pity you missed our last meeting. You don't grasp the idea yet. We buy the land from Sir Charles.

BAMFORD. Yes.

STE. Then we create a demand in the town for a recreation ground.

ALCORN. And you back it up in the Council.

STE. And Alcorn as borough surveyor approves officially.

ALCORN. We force the town to buy from us.

STE. And get a quick return of our capital with a clinking profit.

BAMFORD (*obstinately*). Well, I thought it was houses. Houses are safe, and you'd easier raise a cry for houses than playing fields.

STE. Depends how you go about it. Work it proper and you could get them yelling like kids for a municipal service of flying machines.

(Enter SMITHSON, R.)

SMITHSON. Good evening, gentlemen all.

(STEPHEN grunts and rises.)

ALCORN,  
BAMFORD. } Good evening.

(STEPHEN gives SMITHSON his chair and takes the vacant one R. C. of table.)

SMITHS. Sorry I'm late, but I've been employing my time well. Sowing the seed.

STE. Been getting at the voters?

(SMITHSON sits between ALCORN and STEPHEN.)

SMITHS. Yes, one or two.

STE. You've been wasting time. I've collared a man who'll bring in voters by the score.

ALCORN. Who might that be, Mr. Verity?

STE. Young Montgomery. The parson lad. For all their talk, the Church still has a big hold on the poorer classes. It'll pay to have that boy on our side. He'll talk to them in the Polygon, too.

BAMFORD. Aye. Good man, that, Verity.

STE. (to SMITHSON). There's a letter you'd better read.

(SMITHSON reads it.)

BAMFORD (sullenly; emerging from a silent sulk). I thought it was houses.

STE. Well, it isn't. It 'ud take too much capital to cover the Polygon with houses.

BAMFORD. It was houses. You've altered it. I ought to have been told. No one told me.

SMITHS. (looking up from the letter). He'll come round.

STE. Yes.

BAMFORD (taking it personally; indignantly). Who'll come round? I won't come round. Houses it was and houses it's going to be.

STE. (*moving SMITHSON to give ALCORN the letter. ALCORN pockets it. Dryly.*) We spoke of Sir Charles.

BAMFORD. Oh!

SMITHS. (*tentatively*). I fancy, myself, houses would be a safer battle-cry with the people, Mr. Verity.

STE. Damn the people. Who cares for the people?

ALCORN (*rising*). I really must protest. Such language! (*He seems genuinely shocked.*)

STE. (*impatently*). It's so silly to talk as if the people mattered. Government by the people! Any fool can lead 'em where he wants.

ALCORN (*sitting*). We must consider their feelings a bit. Think of the rates.

STE. Oh, we'll consider their feelings all right. We must make 'em feel what we want 'em to feel. Then they'll vote for what we want and kid themselves we do it for their sake. That's how to consider their feelings. When I was a lad there was a trout stream ran through Carrington. It's a sewer now, but there were trout in it then and I've caught 'em by tickling their bellies. That's the way to catch voters, Mr. Alcorn. Tickle 'em.

ALCORN. Yes, but the trout died. The voter lives to vote next time.

STE. Go on tickling. I'm an old hand and I've never known it fail.

BAMFORD. You're not attending to me. I say houses. Smithson says houses.

SMITHS. (*in alarm*). Oh, no, I don't. Indeed I don't. I only say houses 'ull bring votes quicker than playing fields.

ALCORN. I suppose you couldn't shout houses and make it the other thing afterwards?

SMITHS. I'm surprised at you, Mr. Alcorn. (*Very righteously.*) I stand for purity in municipal life.

BAMFORD. Yes. Always be honest with your electors.

STE. Alcorn's got none. He's a permanent official with a certain job, or he'd know better.

BAMFORD. If I provide a quarter of the capital, I've a right——

STE. You've every right, Mr. Bamford, and we shall do nothing without your approval.

BAMFORD. Then I approve houses. As a rate-payer——

STE. (*definitely*). Only, if it's houses, I can't go on. (*Consternation.*)

SMITHS. (*frightened*). We can't do without your influence.

BAMFORD (*grudgingly*). No, we can't do without Verity.

STE. Our share of what 'ull go on the rates is a flea bite. Our profit 'ull cover it a hundred times. I don't deny the town needs houses, needs 'em badly, only I haven't the capital for houses. My money's tied up and I'm not touching it. The money I'm putting into this isn't my own.

(ALCORN writes on a scrap of paper and passes it to SMITHSON, who reads, nods, and passes it to STEPHEN.)

BAMFORD. Who's is it, if it's a fair question?

STE. My daughter's. I'll want it back quick.

ALCORN. Your daughter's got money, then?

BAMFORD (*very interested*). Your daughter's? Nice looking girl, your daughter. (*Slight pause.*) Well, I'm using my own money and——(*Irritably.*) What's that you're passing round? Another secret from me?

STE. (*blandly*). No. (*Passing him the paper.*)

BAMFORD (*reading*). "Make Bamford Mayor next year." (*He looks up at each in turn.*) Um. Well. Bamford's willing.

ALCORN. I think it's very suitable.

STE. Yes. We'll call it a recreation ground, eh, Mr. Mayor Elect?

BAMFORD. I'm not a favourite with the psalm-singing set, you know.

ALCORN. I've got them in my pocket. They'll be squared all right.

STE. If I say mayor, you'll be mayor. You make a bit on the mayoral allowance, you know. Needn't spend above half of it.

BAMFORD. All right. No need to say more. It's a recreation ground and damn the expense. (*The tension passes.*)

STE. Right. Got those papers with you, Alcorn?

ALCORN. Yes. (*Fussily producing and smoothing the typewritten articles of association.*)

STE. Your signature's wanted, Bamford.

BAMFORD (*examining the paper*). Land Development Syndicate, Ltd. Sounds well, anyhow. Hullo! What's this? Registered Offices, London Wall, E.C.

ALCORN. My brother's office in London.

BAMFORD. Why?

STE. Wouldn't do to have a local address here. Some busybody 'ud smell it out.

BAMFORD. I see. (*Suspiciously.*) What does his brother get out of it?

ALCORN. Nothing; and he's put down three of his clerks for one share apiece to make up the statutory seven shareholders. Those are their signatures above Smithson's and mine.

(BAMFORD *nods.*)

STE. (*dipping pen*). There's a pen.

(BAMFORD *signs.*)

I'll witness. (*Calling off L.*) Lucy!

BAMFORD. I deliver this as my act and deed.

(STEPHEN *signs without sitting. Enter LUCY, L. All rise.*)

LUCY. Did you call, father?



ALCORN (*advancing and speaking with the respect due to a capitalist*). Good evening, Miss Verity.

STE. (*stepping back, and interposing impatiently*). Oh, never mind all that; sit down, Lucy. (*Pushing her into his vacated chair and pointing to the papers, handing pen.*) Write your name there.

LUCY (*vaguely*). My name?

STE. Yes. Can't you hear? See what it is?

LUCY. No.

(BAMFORD'S eyes are set on LUCY with the air of a butcher appraising a sheep.)

STE. (*impatiently*). Oh, never mind. It 'ud take a week to make you understand. You've some money lying at the bank. Mine's all tied up. I want yours for a bit, so just sign your name there. (LUCY signs.) Say "I deliver this as my act and deed."

LUCY. I deliver this as my act and deed. (To STEPHEN.) It's your deed really, you know.

STE. I'll witness. (Signs.) Right.

LUCY (*reading*). The Land Development Syndicate, Ltd.

(STEPHEN takes the paper from under her eyes, folds and hands it to ALCORN.)

STE. You'll see to that, now?

ALCORN. Yes. You're our partner, Miss Verity.

LUCY (*standing*). But what's it all about?

SMITHS. That's right, Miss Verity. Sign first and ask afterwards.

BAMFORD. We're buying up the Polygon. Go ing to make a playing field of it.

(BAMFORD down R.)

LUCY. And presenting it to the town?

(STEPHEN alone doesn't look awkward.)

ALCORN. Well——

STE. (*curtly*). Yes, it 'ull come to the town.

LUCY (*sentimentally*). How noble of you! Oh, thank you! Thank you so much for letting me take a share in this—

STE. (*interrupting*). Yes; now you go and have your supper. It's getting late.

(*Exit LUCY, L.*)

STE. Well, that concludes the business for to-night, gentlemen. Nothing more to be done till we hear from Sir Charles. (*Puts chair back up stage.*)

ALCORN. No, that's all.

STE. (*finally*). Good night, then.

ALCORN. Good night, Verity. (*Crosses R.*)

SMITHS. Good night. (*Shakes hands and crosses R.*)

(*SMITHSON opens the door R. ALCORN follows him, pausing and looking back at BAMFORD.*)

ALCORN. Coming, Bamford?

BAMFORD. No, I want a word with Verity.

SMITHS. (*suspiciously*). Business, eh, Mr. Bamford?

BAMFORD. Not about the Company. (*Glancing involuntarily after LUCY.*) Something else.

(*Exeunt SMITHSON and ALCORN.*)

STE. Well, Bamford? Have anything? I've a better port downstairs than the Polygon toffs can run to.

BAMFORD. No, thanks.

(*STEPHEN looks relieved, BAMFORD sits. Their positions reproduce those of STEPHEN and WALTER at the opening.*)

STE. (*taking his pipe from the mantelpiece*). I'll have a pipe, if you don't mind. Well, what's up with you?

BAMFORD (*jerking his thumb towards the left door*). It's about her.

STE. Aye? Well, I like a man that comes to the point sharp.

BAMFORD. Perhaps you wouldn't call me a marrying man? (*Sitting below fire.*)

STE. You've not done it yet that I know of.

BAMFORD. Never too late to mend. I'm a bit struck with that daughter of yours, Verity.

STE. I noticed you were when I mentioned she had money.

BAMFORD. Well, I'm the last man to deny that money's a very important thing in life.

STE. It's a useful thing to have about the house.

BAMFORD. I was thinking we might come to an arrangement.

STE. It's not impossible..

BAMFORD. Eh!

STE. Only she's a bit young.

BAMFORD. Meaning to say I'm a bit old, eh? I'm sound and hearty.

STE. So's t'other fellow, and more her age.

BAMFORD (*rising*). The other fellow?

STE. (*remaining seated*). Aye. You thought you were being smart, didn't you? Seeing a good thing and dashing at it prompt; but you're the second man to come to me to-night over Lucy, for all that.

BAMFORD (*anxiously*). Is she promised?

STE. No.

BAMFORD (*relieved*). Ah!

STE. The man that weds my daughter takes a tidy bit of money with her.

BAMFORD. It'll find some more of its own kidney if she brings it to me.

STE. To tell you the truth, Sam, I'm not struck on the idea of losing her at all. But she's got a fancy in her head and it's one I don't cotton to. Best cure might be to put you there instead and be sure of her not making a fool of herself.

BAMFORD. Then I'm not too late. (*Sits again.*)

STE. You're the best man up to now.

BAMFORD. Well——

STE. See here, Sam. It's like this. That girl can look high. Question is, are you high enough?

BAMFORD. Which way?

STE. Money.

BAMFORD. Depends what you call high.

STE. Yes . . . (*half apologetically.*) I've a right to know before I put it to her.

BAMFORD (*after slight hesitation*). Well, I'll tell you this: you know what my father left?

STE. Yes.

BAMFORD. There's more to-day. (*They exchange looks.*)

STE. (*rising with resolution*). That 'ull do. (*Opens left door.*) Lucy, come back a minute.

BAMFORD (*rises in alarm*). I'm not what you call a parlour ladies' man.

STE. I'll stand by you.

(*Enter LUCY.*)

Now then. (*Crosses R.*)

LUCY. You want me?

STE. (*indicating BAMFORD*). He does.

BAMFORD (*awkwardly*). Yes, I do, Miss Verity. That's just what I do. I want you.

(*LUCY is puzzled.*)

STE. (*looking at her*). Well?

LUCY (*turning from one to the other*). You want me. I'm here. What do you want me for?

BAMFORD (*L.*). For better or for worse. (*Giggling genially.*)

LUCY (*freezing*). I don't understand you.

STE. (*roughly*). Don't play stupid now. You understand him well enough.

LUCY. But—— (*Looking appealingly at STEPHEN.*)

STE. Here's your chance, my girl. Here's your answer to the other fellow.

LUCY. I have given him my answer.

STE. Well, you can give Mr. Bamford his and say yes. He's got money.

BAMFORD (*eagerly*). Yes, I've got money and I spend it. I'll give you the time of your life.

LUCY. Don't spoil this evening for me, Mr. Bamford. You've made me so happy, so grateful to you all for letting me help in your charity. I only knew to-night how rich I am. It frightened me—the thought of so much money. I was afraid of it . . . of my unworthiness. Until you showed me the way to use it well. I was proud that I . . . and now . . . father, this isn't fair of you.

STE. What isn't fair?

LUCY. Why didn't you tell Mr. Bamford? (*To BAMFORD.*) I'm engaged.

STE. (*R.C.*). Don't lie. You're not.

LUCY (*bravely*). I choose to consider myself engaged.

STE. He's a pauper. Look here, my girl, you're rebellious to-night. I'm master here. I'm not the sort of fool to let you twist me round your little finger. Don't think because you're twenty-one and got a thousand a year (*the sum moves BAMFORD visibly*) that you'll ride rough-shod over me. (*More gently.*) You've got to be sensible. (*Smacks table.*) You've got to do what I tell you.

BAMFORD. You shall have your carriage and dress yourself as much as you like; and what's more, marry me and you'll be Mayoress of Carrington in November.

STE. Wait a minute, Bamford, not so fast.

BAMFORD. What's the matter?

STE. (*crossing L.*). Engaged, if you like, but no wedding till the Polygon deal's complete. The profits on that are mine.

BAMFORD. Of course they are. I'll hand over your share when we've sold to the town.

LUCY. Sold! Profit! I thought—

STE. Never mind what you thought. (*Goes up*)

to LUCY.) That wasn't meant for your ears. You'd better go back to the other room now. I'll talk to you after Mr. Bamford's gone. (*Indicating her to exit.*)

LUCY. I hope Mr. Bamford will remember I'm engaged.

STE. He'll remember you're going to be—to him. (*Crosses down R. above table.*)

LUCY. Father, I've obeyed you long enough. I'm twenty-one now, and I'm going to take my own way.

BAMFORD (*doubtfully*). I don't like the look of this, Verity.

STE. Look of what?

BAMFORD. She's a bit of a Tartar, isn't she?

LUCY. That's nothing to what I can do when I'm roused, Mr. Bamford.

STE. Pssh! It's the first time she's broken out like this. She'll be tame enough next time you come.

LUCY (*viciously*). Don't make too sure of that.

STE. I'm not afraid of that. It's a pity if a man can't do as he likes with his own flesh and blood.

BAMFORD (*warily*). Best sleep on it before you say more, Verity.

STE. (*going to LUCY*). Yes. Go to bed, Lucy, and say over to yourself, I'm going to marry Mr. Bamford. Then you'll get used to the idea.

LUCY. But I'm not.

STE. Aren't you? We'll see.

LUCY. Yes, we will. (*At exit L.*)

CURTAIN.

### ACT III.

ARCHIBALD VINING's house in the Polygon the following afternoon. The room is large and lofty with the air of serene mellowness common to old houses. The door is R., behind the large mantelpiece. Behind is a French window, beyond which the garden is seen. The room is panelled; its incidental trappings suggest occupants hardly able to live up to their surroundings; the furniture is faded; the carpet worn. WALTER sits on a chair to the R. of the window against the wall. Down L. is his father AUGUSTUS MONTGOMERY at an *escritoire*. On a large settee placed crosswise L. sit MRS. MONTGOMERY and MRS. VINING. ARCHIBALD VINING is posed with an elbow on the mantelpiece, looking across at MONTGOMERY. The ladies gaze at him with admiration. MONTGOMERY Senior is sixty, rather bald, weak-faced, futile, dressed in light grey morning coat and trousers. VINING is ruddy, irascible, with white moustache and grey hair, in black morning coat and grey trousers. The women are both rather foolish. MRS. MONTGOMERY is stout and MRS. VINING lean, but there is otherwise not much to choose between them in age, which is about fifty, or anything else. Their dress is conventional without being fashionable or expensive. They live next door and MRS. MONTGOMERY has come in without a hat. The light is of a sunny afternoon and there is no fire. MARJORIE VINING, a tall athletic girl, sits by the window C., with a tennis racket, looking increasingly bored.

VINING (*dictating*). "Your rumoured intention to sell the Polygon"—got that, Montgomery?

MONTGOMERY. Yes. (*Looking up timidly*.) Excuse me, Vining, I can't help saying it again, but are you quite sure we form a quorum?

VIN. (*assertively*). Of course we do, my dear fellow. Don't distress yourself.

MONT. (*desperately*). But—but there are five houses in the Polygon and only two are represented here.

VIN. We know the views of the rest.

MRS. VIN. Their views are ours.

VIN. Quite so. Allow for unavoidable absentees, and your scruples vanish. Shall I proceed?

(*Approval from settee. MONTGOMERY bends and writes.*)

"Dear Sir,—At an indignation meeting of your tenants in the Polygon——"

(*MONTGOMERY writes at intervals, when others talk.*)

MRS. V. Archibald, have we any right to be indignant with Sir Charles?

VIN. We *are* indignant, aren't we?

MRS. V. Yes. But will Sir Charles quite like us to tell him so?

MONT. (*pathetically*). It's deucedly—beg pardon—it's hard to be diplomatic. How would "protest meeting" do?

VIN. Too political. Let "indignation" stand. We must show him he's roused the sleeping lion.

MONT. (*acquiescent*). I'll underline it if you like.

VIN. No! No! Firmness, my dear Monty, firmness, not ostentation.

MRS. M. (*gushingly to MRS. VINING*). What a man of affairs Mr. Vining is!

VIN. (*filling his chest*). I flatter myself I put things through, Mrs. Montgomery. Now, Monty!



MONT. (*reading*). "At the indignation meeting—um—held on the—um—it was resolved to respectfully address—"

MRS. V. Oh!

VIN. (*reprovingly*). Well, Cecilia?

MONT. (*puzzled*). That's in order, I think.

VIN. Quite. Go on.

MRS. V. But, Archibald, to address a split infinitive to a baronet!

VIN. I stand corrected. Thanks, Cecilia.

MONT. I don't quite see—

VIN. (*moving him to write*). It was resolved respectfully to address—

MONT. (*correcting and reading*). To address a letter to you on the subject of your rumoured intention to sell the Polygon.

VIN. Correct, I think? (*Approval from the settee.*)

MONT. (*proceeding*). It is our hope that should this information be correct, bracket, which we hesitate to believe, bracket, you will reconsider your decision to give over to the hands of the jerry builder the only residences in Carrington habitable by persons of refinement.

VIN. Excellent. (*Approval from settee. VINING crosses L. to above MONTGOMERY and takes letter; patronisingly.*) You write a clerkly hand, Monty. (*Picks up pen.*) I'll sign as the oldest resident present.

(MONTGOMERY swallows a protest, remaining seated,  
VINING signs, bending over.)

What a pity Sir Charles is abroad. We shall be kept waiting for his reply.

MONT. You got his address from Dunkerly?

VIN. (*putting envelope before him*). Yes. *Hotel Metropole, Monte Carlo.*

(MONTGOMERY writes and encloses letter. VINING goes to French window and opens it.)

I'll have this posted at once. (*Calls.*) Pilling!

(*He returns.* MONTGOMERY crosses R. and sits above fireplace.)

MONT. Ah, well! That's settled.

VIN. (*sitting at desk*). Yes.

MAR. (*rises*). Jolly glad to hear it. I'm fed up. Come out and play tennis, Walter. (*Puts chair down C.*)

WALTER. Not this afternoon, Marjorie.

MAR. Oh, be a sport.

WALTER. Some other time.

MAR. It's always some other time with you, now. I'm forgetting what you look like in flannels. You'll lose all your form if you don't practice a bit.

WALTER. I'm afraid I must let it go. (*Rises and crosses L.*)

MAR. It's pure slacking. Don't be so beastly serious, if you are in Orders. Come and be a muscular Christian on the lawn.

WALTER. Something more serious to-day, Marjorie.

MAR. Oh, rot! What's the good of having the courts if you don't use 'em?

MONT. They certainly might be used more by you young people.

WALTER. They might be used by hundreds of people if—

MAR. Oh, blow, you're getting on your hobby horse again. I'm going to practice putting if you won't give me a game. You are a rotter.

(*Exit MARJORIE C. to L. PILLING appears C. from L. in his shirt-sleeves.*)

VIN. (*closes desk and crosses up L.C.*). Oh, Pilling, just post this letter at once. Are your hands clean?

PILLING (*inspecting his very black hands*). Not very, sir.

VIN. Go and wash them and come back for it.

PILLING. Yes, sir.

(PILLING *vanishes to R.* VINING *crosses to fire.*)

MRS. M. I can't understand Sir Charles wanting to sell at all.

MRS. V. No. What would Carrington be without the Polygon?

WALTER (*quietly*). I'm not sure that it wouldn't be a good deal better off, Mrs. Vining.

(*They all stare at him astonished.*)

VIN. What an extraordinary thing to say. Why, we *are* Carrington.

MRS. V. We've always lived in the Polygon. We've taken root, Carrington's gone on its way—

VIN. A precious bad way, too.

MONT. Other times, other manners, Vining.

VIN. Carrington has no manners—but the Polygon has stood aloof. Thank God we leisured people have no connection with the town roughs.

WALTER. Then how can you say you *are* Carrington?

VIN. We are the best people in Carrington, sir. Do you judge a place by its quality or by the counting of heads?

WALTER. I wish I could make you see their point of view, Mr. Vining.

VIN. (*snorting*). *Their* point of view.

WALTER (*quietly*). They have one, you know. Before that letter goes to Sir Charles, I'd like to try.—

MRS. M. Walter, remember what the Polygon means to all of us.

WALTER. It's a survival, mother. It's out of date in the midst of a modern manufacturing town.

MONT. (*pathetically*). But—but, Walter, it means so tremendously much to us all. It may be out of date, but I did hope it was going to last our time.

VIN. It's *got* to last our time. (*Sincerely.*) I'm not a deeply religious man, but I get reverent when I think of the Polygon.

MRS. M. That's just it. We all love the Polygon.

MRS. V. The five houses.

MONT. Chatsworth.

MRS. V. Apsley House.

MRS. M. Marlborough Lodge.

VIN. Kenilworth and Abbotsford.

MONT. And our gardens.

VIN. And the tennis ground in the middle.

WALTER. Which nobody uses except Marjorie.

MRS. V. Are we to lose it *all*?

VIN. (*with appropriate chest expansion.*) Not if Archibald Vining can prevent it.

WALTER. You make it very hard for me to go on.

VIN. Then don't go on.

WALTER (*crosses c.*). I must. Father, Mr. Vining, you—all of you—are wrapped up in the Polygon. You hardly go out of it except to the station.

MONT. There's nothing else in Carrington to go to.

VIN. Thank goodness we've no business to take us into those mean streets.

WALTER. *You* haven't, Mr. Vining, but I have. I see the other side of the picture, if you don't.

VIN. Well, my dear boy, every town has its back stairs.

WALTER (*sits c.*). Carrington's all back stairs, and cramped stairs they are. There's no breathing space. What right have we to monopolize the air? We've room to move about—so much room that you need never go out of the Polygon.

MONT. We pay for the privilege, don't we?

WALTER. Yes, you pay for it in money and they pay for the lack of it in health.

MONT. If there's overcrowding it's a matter for the town authorities to deal with.

WALTER. They want to deal with it. They want the Polygon.

VIN. They can't have it. They must know it 'ud be cutting off their nose to spite their face. The Polygon's essential to Carrington.

WALTER. Why?

VIN. It *is* Carrington. I tell you this, young man, Carrington's last state would be worse than its first if you took us away. We—we circulate money. We give the place a tone.

WALTER. It's a tone the place could do without. It could do without your money. We are not Carrington. The factories are the essential Carrington. Mr. Vining, (*rising and taking a step to R. C.*) let me show you what it's like—whole families living—no, not living—pigging in a single room. Rooms cut up amongst two or three families. All in Carrington, our neighbours in Christian Carrington.

VIN. Thanks. I'm not the sort of man to put my head into a noose. I prefer to keep out of infection.

WALTER (*appealingly*). Don't send that letter to Sir Charles. Don't try to influence his decision. The workpeople can't move out of the town. They must live near their work. You can move. Dividends can reach you anywhere just as easily.

MRS. V. Move of ourselves! Never!

MRS. M. Walter, you don't understand what you're asking us to do. You're young. You can change easily, because you're young and restless. But when you've lived in a house that's dear to you till it's become part of your life, you can't leave it in your old age.

(WALTER *crosses above settee.*)

MONT. I can't leave my garden. You know that. No other garden would mean the same to me.

VIN. My dear friends, you needn't worry. Carrington would never let us go. Walter's got hold of the wrong end of the stick. We're an institution.

WALTER. How do you know? Did you ever ask them what they think of us?

VIN. I'll ask Pilling. You'll see. (*Crosses up c.*)

WALTER. I shouldn't advise you to. I know Pilling's home. He's a wife and child. They all live in one room.

VIN. Why, I pay the man twenty-two shillings a week. What does he live like that for?

WALTER. He's no choice. Pilling 'ull tell you what Carrington thinks of the Polygon.

VIN. He's a long time washing his hands. (*Goes up to window and looks off R.*)

WALTER. But you're not going to send that letter now.

VIN. Certainly we are. (*Returns R.C.*)

WALTER. But—

MONT. I think we're all agreed on that?

VIN. Quite. No stone unturned. That fellow who's coming, what's his name—you know, Walter—that alderman—

WALTER. Verity?

VIN. Verity. That's it. We must make sure of the town authorities. A little affability goes a long way with people of that sort.

MRS. V. Yes. He's not the type of man you're accustomed to meet in my drawing-room, Mrs. Montgomery, still—

MONT. It's in a good cause, Mrs. Vining.

MRS. M. He's an architect, isn't he?

WALTER. He's a builder who's his own architect. That's why his houses fall to pieces.

MRS. M. That's what I say. An architect. Almost a professional man.

WALTER. But you mustn't pin your faith on Verity. He's the last man—

VIN. Walter, as a Churchman, I am always willing to accept your views on religious matters. But when it comes to worldly questions, permit me to have an opinion of my own.

(PILLING *appears and knocks on the window without advancing into the room.*)

Oh, Pilling!

PILLING (*in c.o.*). Yes, sir?

VIN. Come in.

(PILLING *advances a foot and stands awkwardly near the window.*)

PILLING. Letter ready, sir?

VIN. (*absently*). Yes, yes. (MONTGOMERY *rises, gets letter from mantel; hands it to VINING.*) There you are.

(*Up to PILLING, who turns to go.*)

One moment, Pilling, I want to ask you something. Can you tell me how people in the town talk of the Polygon?

PILLING. How they talk, sir?

VIN. Yes. What's the general opinion of us?

PILLING. It's not for the likes of me to talk against the gentry.

WALTER. They *do* talk against us, then?

PILLING (*awkwardly*). Well, sir—— (*He pauses.*)

WALTER (*helping him out*). Tell them how you live, Pilling.

PILLING. You can tell that as well as me.

VIN. (*impatiently*). Yes, yes, but that's not the point. Doesn't your class feel what a privilege it is to have us living in your midst?

PILLING (*earnestly*). I'd be badly off without you, sir.

VIN. You'd be sorry to lose us, eh?

WALTER. Of course *he* would. A gardener's no use if there's nothing to garden. Only Carrington's not a garden city. It's a manufacturing town.

MONT. (*with back to fire, to PILLING*). Supposing now you weren't a gardener?

VIN. Yes. What's the common view of us?

PILLING. Well, sir, it 'ud seem to me against nature if the town had no quality in it.

VIN. (*turning triumphantly to WALTER*). You see? (*Patronising PILLING*.) You're perfectly right, Pilling. I've noticed it before. (*Talking at the ladies*.) The masses always have this instinctive clinging to their superiors. They know we're the source of all prosperity.

PILLING (*shyly*). There's queer talk, sometimes, sir. I know gentlemen are different from us, but there's men in this town wanting to tell me we're all born equal—asking your pardon, sir.

MRS. V. You know better than that, Pilling.

PILLING. Yes, mum.

VIN. You could never get on without us.

PILLING. No, sir.

WALTER. Be honest, man. No one's going to hurt you for it. Tell us the truth, about the overcrowding and the waste of valuable space in the Polygon.

MRS. V. Yes. Tell us the truth, Pilling, and say you know how necessary we are.

PILLING. You're bread and butter to me, mum, and I know it.

VIN. There you are, Walter.

WALTER (*impatiently*). But he's an exception. He's—

VIN. (*interrupting*). You've got the letter, Pilling.

PILLING. Yes, sir. (*Turning, then courageously*.) There's no denying as the overcrowding's something cruel. I wouldn't say a word of it, not to you, sir, if I didn't know and see and suffer it.

(MONTGOMERY *sits again below fire*.)

VIN. That'll do, Pilling.

PILLING. Yes, sir. (*Turns to go*.)

WALTER (*to Vining, crossing above sofa c.*). You heard that. Won't you wait? Wait till Verity's been. You'll catch the same post.



VIN. (*pause*). Give me the letter, Pilling, I'll keep it back a little.

PILLING. Yes, sir.

(*Exit PILLING, C.*)

WALTER. Thank you, Mr. Vining.

(MAID announces MR. VERITY. MAID *withdraws*. STEPHEN *is dressed as Act II, and very sure of himself, except at odd moments.*)

VIN. (*patronisingly*). Ah, Mr. Verity. Pleased to see you. (*Advancing.*)

STE. (*up R. C., shaking hands; very formally*). How do you do?

VIN. You know us all, I think?

STE. (*dryly*). By sight.

VIN. (*hurriedly*). Yes. Sit down, won't you? (*Sits above fire.*)

(STEPHEN *does so, uncomfortably, C. WALTER stands R. end of settee.*)

Now come to business, Mr. Verity.

STE. Yes?

VIN. What we want to see you about is this con-founded rumour of the Polygon's being up for sale for building lots. No doubt you've heard it?

STE. I've heard tell of it.

VIN. Have you thought about it at all?

STE. I've thought a lot.

MONT. Well, what do you think, Mr. Verity? Could anything be more absurd?

STE. (*nodding his head towards WALTER*). Ask him. He knows what I think.

WALTER. Mr. Verity's of my opinion, father.

VIN. We don't want your opinion, sir. You're full up with all sorts of idiotic modern sentimentalism about the poor. It all comes of the Church meddling with secular matters instead of minding its own business. Mr. Verity's a man of sense.

STE. Thank you; but I don't know that I can do anything.

MRS. M. (*sweetly*). Oh, but I'm sure you can, Mr. Verity. You've such influence in the town. You're a man of weight.

STE. If I am, madam, what had the town to do with Sir Charles selling the Polygon?

MONT. How can the town get on without the Polygon?

MRS. M. I'm sure you, as an architect, Mr. Verity, must feel the importance of preserving such fine examples as these are of old Georgian mansions.

MRS. V. So many links with the historic past.

VIN. (*impatently*). It 'ud be a blue ruin for the town.

MONT. Sheer catastrophe. You're a leading personage here, Mr. Verity—alderman and so on. Of course you have the interest of the town at heart.

STE. (*with faint irony*). As much as you have yourselves, I dare say.

VIN. (*recovering first from the slight general embarrassment*). Er, yes. Now, don't you think a petition from the Town Council to Sir Charles might do the trick? You see, the Polygon's the backbone of the place. I can't for the life of me imagine what Sir Charles is thinking of.

STE. The price.

MRS. V. Now, that's ungenerous of you, Mr. Verity. Sir Charles would never be so selfish.

STE. (*stolidly*). Think not?

MRS. V. He wouldn't turn us out for money. (VINING and MONTGOMERY are not so sure.)

STE. It's hard times for the rich.

MONT. (*timidly*). Yes, I suppose it is.

STE. (*with aggression*). It is. I know. I'm rich.

VIN. (*pompously*). I agree with you. We people of independent means have been hard hit lately. What with the differential income tax and the super tax, we—

STE. We all think we'd like to pay the super tax, don't we?

VIN. Er—yes—we can rely on your sending that petition then?

STE. Can you?

MONT. I thought you said so.

STE. I don't remember.

VIN. Dash it, Verity, we men of property must hang together. In a little matter of this sort I'm sure you'll come in with us.

STE. Yes? Well, I'm sorry to disoblige you.

MRS. M. But surely as an architect—

STE. (*interrupting*). Now it's no use of you talking. I've said my say.

MONT. But you must have some reason. This is really most extraordinary.

STE. Is it? What's extraordinary in a man getting back a bit of his own?

VIN. Have we offended you, Mr. Verity? I'm very sorry. You speak as if you had some grudge against us.

STE. Grudge? I hate the sight of you if that's your meaning.

MONT. (*rising*). This is simply staggering. Why, Mr. Verity, we've always been good neighbours, I hope.

STE. (*still sitting*). You've kept yourselves to yourselves, if that's what you call being good neighbours. Who've you been good neighbours to? The shopkeepers? You don't deal with them if you can help it. London's your mark when you've money to spend, and that's not every day of the week. How often have you got your hand down for a local charity? Folks get sick and tired of coming to ask. You buttoned up your pockets so tight.

VIN. Other people, at least, don't share your views, sir.

STE. Ask 'em. (*Rising*.) You silly little set of genteel paupers, who did you think you were? (*Ladies*

rise.) We weren't good enough for you. You lived in the Polygon; we lived in the town, and you held your noses too high to see us if you met us, which wasn't often, because you stuck inside your private preserve and didn't have truck with us vulgar folk outside. We weren't your class. You patronising snobs, do you fancy I can't see through your getting me here and soaping me to send your petition from the town for you? The town can go to blazes for all you care, so long as you're left alone in your nice big gardens.

VIN. (*rises and goes up to door R.*). Mr. Verity, I'm sorry to have to remind you there are ladies present.

STE. I can see 'em. That's why I'm letting you down so easy. I'd let it rip if you'd the courage to turn 'em out and meet me man to man.

MRS. M. (*moving towards door*). We'll go.

MONT. (*R., timidly*). I'd rather you didn't, my dear.

STE. Yes. He'd rather you stayed, and kept a stopper on my tongue.

(*VINING opens door and signs to ladies to go.*)

WALTER (*coming to R. of VERITY*). No, mother. Mr. Verity, don't let us lose our tempers about this. It's too important for petty feelings.

VIN. (*indignantly*). Petty feelings, indeed!

(*The ladies stand by door, irresolute.*)

WALTER (*appealingly*). Oh, don't split hairs over words. The town's crying for fresh air and health. The town wants to buy the Polygon.

MONT. The town does?

WALTER. Yes, didn't you know?

VIN. (*looking at STEPHEN*). So it's the town?

WALTER (*as STEPHEN doesn't answer*). Yes.

MRS. M. (*up by door, R., dropping to MONTGOMERY*

by fire). Augustus, don't you think, after all, we ought perhaps to—— (*Hesitating.*)

VIN. (L. C. *fiercely*). To what, Mrs. Montgomery?

MRS. M. Well, I'm sure there's something in what Mr. Verity and Walter say. (*Sits in arm-chair above fire.*)

MONT. Come, this is weakness, my dear.

VIN. No compromise, Mrs. Montgomery.

MRS. M. I shall never feel at ease again when I think of the overcrowding in the town.

VIN. Then don't think of it.

MRS. M. I can't help thinking of it now.

MONT. (*to WALTER*). Oh, dear, I do wish you'd kept your mouth closed.

WALTER. And my eyes closed, and my nose closed, and gone about Carrington without looking at it. No, father, I meant to stir your conscience, and I'm glad I've done it. (*Sits.*)

VIN. Well, I must admit—hang it, Verity, if people are crowded why don't you build 'em houses? It's your trade.

STE. No land.

(*About here PILLING appears C. with some garden stuff in his hand, and MRS. VINING exit with him for some consultation.*)

VIN. There's land enough outside. Why can't the town expand outwards? To hear you talk about the Polygon the town might have a wall round it.

MONT. Yes, there's lots of moorland about the place.

STE. Quite so. Lots of moor.

MONT. Well, then!

STE. Shooting moor. Sir Charles' shooting moor.

VIN. Well, what difference do a few acres more or less make to a shooting moor? Surely he'd rather sell you some of that.

STE. Think so?

MONT. I'm certain of it.

STE. (*sitting on settee*). You're wrong, then. He's holding on for a rise. He's held on to this till the value went up. Land here in the centre's worth more than land outside. This is ripe. The other isn't. That's why he'll sell this.

VIN. (R. C.). Well, if that's really so——

STE. (*grimly*). It's really so.

VIN. (*with an air of finality*). All I can say is I shall most certainly have to revise my opinion of Sir Charles. (*Crosses down L.*)

(PILLING is visible through the window working a mowing machine in the garden; he passes and re-passes at intervals.)

STE. Did you think your tin pot rents paid Sir Charles to let land like this lie idle?

MONT. He likes to have us here. We're desirable tenants.

STE. Pardon me. As a property owner I know. Desirable tenants are paying tenants.

VIN. Do you insinuate that we don't pay?

STE. You don't pay a profitable price. He can make a little gold mine of the Polygon. Land values in the town have been going up all the time. He's cute enough to know it, or his agent is. The only question is, will our price tempt him or is he able to be greedy and wait a bit longer till the land's worth more.

MONT. And you mean to tell me we've been living on the edge of a volcano all these years?

STE. You've been living in Sir Charles' almshouses for decayed gentilefolk. That's our name for it in the town.

VIN. Sir!

STE. (*calmly*). It's the truth. What did it matter to him how little he got out of you meantime? He knew very well it's a fortune waiting for him whenever he wants it.

MONT. I'd no idea of this. (*Sits below fire.*)

STE. You know now. If you hadn't been so busy with thinking what nice people you were and what nasty brutes lived outside you'd have found it out for yourselves. Not one of you's on lease. You can all be turned out at six months' notice.

VIN. We trusted to Sir Charles' sense of honour.

STE. I wouldn't trust him with sixpence, and I'm a sound Tory at that.

VIN. I still think you're wrong, sir. You've given us your view. We're much obliged. (*Sits L.*)

STE. (*sneering*). You'd be more obliged if I'd given you your petition.

VIN. Your view was unexpected.

STE. Was it? (*Turning to WALTER.*) I thought he'd told you.

VIN. Unexpectedly strong.

STE. You've not heard the half of it. You've been the bane of the town. It's a working town and it does the working man no good to have the sight of a lot of idle people living well and doing nothing for it. Breeds discontent. Makes him ask questions. That's what you've been to us. A public nuisance. Easy game for every agitator to have his shy at. Do you think we employers loved you? They didn't mind us. They could see we worked for our living. But you set of do-nothing wastrels——

WALTER (*c.*). Mr. Verity! (*VINING rises and goes up to back, returns, then round to R. C.*)

STE. What's to do? You've been saying the same to them yourself, haven't you?

WALTER. I did my best to gild the pill.

STE. Well, I'm not a parson. I haven't the gift of using big words for little 'uns and talking sweetly about Hell.

VIN. (*dropping R. of WALTER to below him*). Well, now look here, Mr. Verity, you needn't suppose that I'm influenced in the slightest by your extremely forcible language, but a possible compromise occurs to me.

STE. Does it? I thought I heard you say just now "no compromise."

VIN. (R. C.). This is a compromise of my own suggesting, sir.

STE. I'm not the compromising sort. Still, go ahead. What's your idea?

VIN. It's this, sir. I grant you we're drones, and I can see there's something in what you say about the sight of a few idle people taking a lot of room, though I take exception to the way you put it.

STE. (*drily*). Aye.

VIN. (R. C.). Now we've an affection for these houses of ours.

STE. Of Sir Charles'.

VIN. Yes, of Sir Charles'. We're attached to the bricks and mortar. You can understand it.

STE. I never thought you'd shift willing.

VIN. Just so. We're not willing to shift. But my idea is this. We're all old people, and our families have married off. There's no young blood in the Polygon, except Walter here and my daughter, to use those tennis courts and croquet lawns of ours. They're pleasant to walk about in and it's a real sacrifice to part with them. But I propose writing to Sir Charles suggesting that if (*crossing to L. C. and back; returns to L. for end of speech*) he cares to sell you some building land outside the town we will sacrifice our lawns for a park if he will leave our bricks and mortar standing till—till we old fogies have done with them. How does that strike you, Mr. Verity?

STE. It strikes me your motto will do for me as well as for you.

VIN. My motto?

STE. No compromise, Mr. Vining.

WALTER. Mr. Verity, surely it's a fair offer. It's generous. It's—

STE. Indeed! If that's your notion of generosity—



VIN. It's my last word.

STE. (*rises*). Then I need stay no longer. (*Moves towards door.*)

WALTER (*rises*). Oh, but——

(MAID announces "Miss Verity." Enter LUCY. Exit MAID.)

STE. You! What are you doing here?

LUCY (*crosses up R. C.*). I came to see Walter.

STE. But—I locked you up.

LUCY. As you see, I've escaped.

WALTER. Locked you up!

LUCY. Oh, yes. Father does things like that.

STE. Come home, girl.

LUCY. Not yet. I'm a rebel to-day. You locked me up because I refused to marry Mr. Bamford——

WALTER. What!

LUCY. And I've escaped to tell the truth about you and——

STE. Hold your tongue.

LUCY. No. I'm going to tell Walter all I know.

STE. (*sneering*). He's welcome to all you know.

LUCY. He's welcome to all I know and all I am.

MRS. M. Walter, what does this mean? (*Rises.*)

VIN. I have never heard a more immodest speech.

WALTER. Miss Verity and I are engaged.

STE. You're not. You agreed last night that you weren't.

LUCY. That was before you had thrown me at Bamford's head. I'm engaged to Walter, and I've things to tell him, things I've discovered about——

STE. Be quiet, will you.

LUCY. No. This is no time for concealment. We've got beyond all that.

STE. You've nothing to conceal.

LUCY. Then why do you try to stop my mouth?

STE. I don't. I'm here on business. I've no time for girls' foolishness. Vining, can we go somewhere to draft that letter? (*Crosses down to VINING.*)

VIN. Letter? What letter?

STE. The compromise.

VIN. I thought you said—— (*Crossing slowly.*)

STE. Never mind what I said. Shall we go?

LUCY. Yes, go, while I tell Walter all I know.

STE. Tell him what you like now.

(*Exit STEPHEN with VINING.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

VERITY'S dining-room as <sup>1</sup>Act II; <sup>1</sup>a week later. BAMFORD and STEPHEN enter from R. STEPHEN just pocketing his watch.

STEPHEN. You're a bit early for the meeting, Sam.  
(Crosses to c. above table.)

BAMFORD. Yes; fact is, I wanted a word with you alone about that other matter.

STE. Lucy?

BAM. (R. C.). Aye. I'm a bit uneasy about it, Verity.

STE. No need to be.

BAM. Well, I am.

STE. Natural enough, I dare say. When a young man's fancy turns to thoughts of love it churns up his inside a bit.

BAM. 'Tisn't that. I'm not a young man.  
(Crosses L.)

STE. You're young enough for all marriageable purposes.

BAM. I'm doubtful if I'm the right man to make that girl happy.

STE. You're going to be Mayor, aren't you?

BAM. Yes.

STE. And you promised her a carriage?

BAM. Yes.

STE. And as much dressing as she's a mind to?

BAM. Yes.

STE. (sits above table). Then what's troubling you? What else does any female woman want?

BAM. (*sits L. of table*). Eh! I dunno! They're a grasping lot, women.

STE. Damn you, Sam, do you fancy my girl's not been well brought up? You're as good as telling me she's not good enough for you.

BAM. Nay, I'm not; I'm only thinking I may not be good enough for her.

STE. I'm best judge of that. The thing's settled. We said it once, you and I, and we're not weather-vanes.

BAM. (*resignedly*). Yes, I suppose it's settled.

STE. That's all right, then.

(MAID *announces* MR. SMITHSON. *Enter* SMITHSON, R.  
MAID *exit*.)

Ah, good evening, Smithson. (*Rises*.)

SMITHS. Good evening, Verity. (*Shakes hands*.)  
Evening, Bamford.

BAM. Good evening.

STE. (*to* SMITHSON). Seen anything of Alcorn?

SMITHS. Yes. He's gone round to the Post Office on his way here to see if a letter's been forwarded from the London office.

STE. Well, sit you down.

(*They sit at table*. STEPHEN *head*, SMITHSON R.  
and BAMFORD L.)

I've a bit of news for you gentlemen.

SMITHS. Yes?

STE. I've been paying a call—afternoon call on some friends of mine in the Polygon.

BAM. What!

STE. Take it easy, Sam. (*Chuckles*.) Aye, they wanted the Council to petition Sir Charles not to sell. Tried to get me to do it for 'em.

SMITHS. Good, that.

STE. Well, we'd a little talk, Mr. Vining and I, and we come to a sort of a compromise.

SMITHS. Compromise?

BAM. Compromise. Verity? I don't like that word.

STE. Finish was, they've written to Sir Charles asking him to sell the town their grass plat—tennis courts and what-not—if he'll leave their houses alone.

BAM. Verity, I don't like this. Ask me, it sounds like treachery to the company.

STE. Treachery be hanged. I drafted the letter myself.

BAM. That makes it worse.

STE. Don't be stupid, Sam.

BAM. (*indignantly*). Stupid! I say, Verity—

STE. Put yourself in Sir Charles' place. He's got an offer, the company's offer, cash down for the whole Polygon.

SMITHS. Aye.

STE. Well, say he has got a soft spot for his tenants there, old tenants, doesn't want to turn them out, that sort of thing.

SMITHS. Quite likely.

STE. Then he gets their letter. Sees they're ready to lose their tennis courts. All right, says he, if they're a slack back set of weaklings to propose that of themselves, I shan't have any trouble in getting shut of them altogether. Their rents aren't worth having. But the company's offer's a sound ready cash affair. He's a bit short of the ready, isn't he?

BAM. Aye. Above a bit.

STE. So when he sees they'll shift without trouble, being weak enough to offer a compromise before they're even asked for one, he'll take a flying jump at our offer, and there you are. And a good afternoon's work I call it.

BAM. Verity, I apologize. You're the dandiest schemer I ever saw, and I've seen some warm members in my time.

STE. Well, they sent for me. I didn't think this out. I just saw the chance while I was there.

SMITHS. You don't let much pass you, Verity.

STE. I take my brains along when I go calling of an afternoon on my swell friends. I'd like to bet that letter Alcorn's fetching says "Yes" to our offer.

BAM. It's odds on, or I'd take you.

(MAID announces Mr. Walter Montgomery. Enter WALTER. Exit MAID.)

STE. Hullo! Oh, damn!

WALTER (R. C.). Good evening, Mr. Verity. Good evening. I hope I don't interrupt business.

STE. Young man, you appear to have a lot of time on your hands.

WALTER. It's an important part of my business to visit my parishioners, Mr. Verity.

STE. Humph! Our turn for your parochial attentions soon comes round again. You were here a week ago.

WALTER. On my own business that time, sir.

STE. What is it this time?

WALTER. You're sure I'm not interrupting you?

STE. I'm sure you are. Go on.

WALTER. I've come to put you on your guard. You led me to suppose, and I in turn told Mr. Vining, that the town authorities were proposing to buy the Polygon.

STE. And aren't they?

WALTER. As an Alderman you ought to know that better than I do.

STE. Never mind what I know. The question is, what do you know?

WALTER. Oh, we fellows who go into the Church don't know much. You told me yourself we go there because we're chicken-hearted fools without an ounce of sense or fight in us.

BAM. Can't you make him cut the cackle, Verity?

WALTER. Cackling's a professional failing, Mr. Bamford. We get the talking habit in the pulpit.

BAM. You're not in the pulpit now.

WALTER. No, sir. In the pulpit I'm in good company—my own.

BAM. What the——

WALTER. In this room I'm in the company of certain members of a rascally syndicate who hope to buy the Polygon cheap from Sir Charles and sell dear to the town when they've carefully engineered a public demand.

SMITHS. Who told you?

STE. Tch, Smithson! Where the devil did you raise this cock and bull story?

WALTER. Oh, I don't think it was the devil. On the *contrary*, in fact, Mr. Verity.

STE. Come to facts.

WALTER. Facts? Shall I give you names? (*Strolls round back to fireplace.*) I regret the absence of Mr. Alcorn and Miss Verity, but—well, gentlemen, you're found out.

STE. (*pause*). And if we are? (*Rises.*)

SMITHS. (*to STEPHEN*). And if we are, some one's blabbed.

BAM. (*to STEPHEN*). And you're the only one who pays afternoon calls in the Polygon.

STE. (*bending over table, beneath his breath*). Fools! (*Aloud.*) Do you think I foul my own nest?

BAM. Then if it isn't you, who is it? Tell me that.

(STEPHEN *looks first at BAMFORD, then SMITHSON, then suddenly moves to door L. and calls.*)

STE. Lucy! Lucy! Come here! (*Returns above table.*)

BAM. That's the worst of having a woman in the thing. They will talk.

STE. How could she talk? She knew nothing.

(LUCY *enters.*)

WALTER (L.). Funny how things get about, isn't it?

LUCY (*up L.*). Did you call me, father?

STE. (*to WALTER, still ignoring LUCY*). Get about? How many have you told?

WALTER. Oh, I've told nobody. Secrets cease to be valuable when they're told, and I don't mind telling you this secret's going to be a valuable lever to me.

STE. (*to LUCY*). You've been talking to him.

LUCY (*up L.*). Yes. I told him all you told me.

STE. I didn't tell you anything.

LUCY. Oh, yes. You and Mr. Bamford. (*STEPHEN turns on BAMFORD.*)

BAM. I? I never breathed.

LUCY. You squabbled together about the profits.

BAM. We *did* say something.

STE. And you pieced it out from that?

LUCY. Yes.

BAM. Um! smart girl, Verity. Chip of the old block.

STE. Bit too smart this time. I hope she'll never play *you* a trick like that.

BAM. Yes, by Gad. I hadn't thought of that.

WALTER. Well, gentlemen?

STE. Oh, I'll attend to you. Look here, Sam—Smithson, I'll tackle this chap. Just go into the other room there, will you? (*Pushes SMITHSON to go below table.*) I've a private word for the parson.

BAM. Can I smoke there?

STE. (R. C.). Aye.

(*Exeunt L., BAMFORD and SMITHSON. WALTER before fireplace, LUCY C, above table, STEPHEN R. of table.*)

Now, Mr. Montgomery, my lad, what sort of a trick do you call this to play on your future father-in-law? You've a queer idea of tact, you have.

WALTER. It wasn't my intention to be tactful, sir.

STE. You're not improving your chances of marrying my daughter, you know.



WALTER. How do you know I want to marry her?

LUCY. Walter!

STE. Why, you told me so yourself, the other night.

(LUCY sits in armchair L. above fire.)

WALTER. Since then, you see, I've made discoveries. If a man is known by the company he keeps, the same applies to a woman. The woman I'm going to marry doesn't help to form a robbery syndicate along with Messieurs Alcorn, Smithson and Bamford. So if you thought to buy my silence by giving me your daughter, you made a bad mistake. No. Bamford's the man for her. Partners in scoundrelism, partners in life.

(Enter BAMFORD L. and crosses R. C.)

STE. What do you want now?

BAM. (*apologetically, crossing R.*). All right. I only want my pipe. Left it in my overcoat.

WALTER. Mr. Bamford, I congratulate you. (*Holding out hand.*)

BAM. Eh? On what?

WALTER. On being my successful rival for the hand of Miss Verity.

BAM. What's this? Was *he* the other you spoke of? (*To STEPHEN.*)

WALTER (*to LUCY*). Don't be afraid.

STE. Yes.

BAM. (*to WALTER*). Who told you about me?

WALTER. Oh, news soon gets round. (*Lightly.*)

BAM. (*R. C.*). Does it? Well, there's two sorts of news. Correct news and incorrect news. Both sorts gets round, but incorrect news gets round most. See what I mean?

STE. (*sternly*). I don't.

BAM. (*to STEPHEN*). You will. (*To WALTER*). Look here, have you given her up?

WALTER. You wouldn't have me stand in your way, would you?

BAM. So you *have* given her up. Why?

WALTER. Oh, I had my reasons.

BAM. Had you now? I'd like to hear those reasons.

WALTER. That's not quite fair to the lady, I think.

STE. No. He's out of it.

BAM. Is he? I take no man's leavings without I know why he left 'em.

WALTER. It's all square, man. She's yours now.

BAM. I beg to differ.

STE. (*angrily*). What?

LUCY (*rises to go*). The goods needn't be on exhibition while the sale proceeds.

(STEPHEN *points her angrily to chair L. She sits.*)

STE. Here, sit down. Now, Sam, what's it all about?

BAM. I'd as lief tell you when you're by yourself.

WALTER. I thought so.

STE. You can speak now. We're all concerned in this.

WALTER. I beg your pardon. I've ceased to——

STE. (*his back to the right door*). Now, Sam?

WALTER (*sitting below fire*). Oh, very well.

BAM. (*R. C., awkwardly*). Well, I've been thinking things over. The married state and—well—— (*Hesitating.*)

STE. (*grimly*). Yes, go on.

BAM. (*desperately*). It means giving up too much.

STE. (*C.*). And a good thing, too, Sam Bamford. How much longer do you think you'll last at the pace you go? You're cracking up already—not half the man you were.

LUCY (*icily*). Think how nice it would be to have me for a nurse. I warm father's carpet slippers beautifully, don't I, and my gruel's a dream.

BAM. There's many a long day between me and carpet slippers and gruel. I like roving about, Verity, and that's a fact.

STE. Didn't you think of that before?

BAM. I spoke hurried.

STE. It's time you settled down. You won't lose much that a thousand a year and home comforts don't match.

BAM. I'm rich enough.

STE. You didn't talk like that on Tuesday.

BAM. (*irritably*). I tell you, I've thought things over. Fact is, I didn't half like the way she answered you back. A man gets enough worries in his working day. When he gets home he wants peace and no back answers.

STE. She's all right now. It was having him asking (*indicating* WALTER) that made her proud. He's thrown her over—not good enough for him.

BAM. And she's not good enough for me, either. I can be a bit particular myself. I like 'em quiet.

STE. She's as quiet as they make 'em.

LUCY. Father, I absolutely and finally decline to marry Mr. Bamford.

BAM. I ask you, does that sound like a quiet life?

STE. Well, damme, Sam Bamford, you can't get a thousand a year without paying a tax on it.

BAM. You can pay too much tax if you get a woman thrown in with a razor instead of a tongue.

STE. (*disgustedly*). I thought you were a man of your word.

BAM. And I thought you cracked to be a friend of mine.

STE. I am your friend.

BAM. Perhaps; but as a rule when a man's as anxious as you are to sell an article I begin to think there's something wrong with the goods.

STE. Didn't I tell you on Tuesday I didn't want her to marry at all?

BAM. Didn't Sir Charles' agent write me he

wouldn't want to sell? And you know what you said about that.

STE. But I'm not selling. I'm giving.

BAM. Yes, and nobody ever knew you to give away anything worth having. What's he given her the chuck for, if it comes to that? He knows something.

WALTER. Yes. I know something, Mr. Bamford.

STE. (*raps table*). I'm not going to be played about with like this. I never asked either of you to come after my daughter. You came because you liked, but you'll not cry off when you like.

BAM. What do you mean now?

STE. *One* of you's going to marry her.

BAM. It won't be me, then. I don't want any woman with a temper of her own.

STE. I tell you she hasn't got a temper.

LUCY (*rises*). I've got a tongue.

STE. Be quiet.

LUCY. I won't be quiet while you wrangle over me like——

STE. (*thundering*). Go to your room. I'll tame you.

(LUCY *deliberately sits down.*)

BAM. There you are, Verity. Regular spitfire. Too late to send her away now. I know what she is.

WALTER (*rising*). So do I. She's a monstrous woman with an abnormally developed bump of business capacity and I absolutely decline to marry any member of a syndicate of avaricious thieves formed to swindle——

STE. (*interrupting*). She's no more business capacity than a flea and I'll take her off the syndicate to-night, if that 'ull please you. Now then, which of you is it to be?

BAM. I don't wish to quarrel with you, Verity. I've told you I'm taking none.

STE. (*briskly*). All right. Then you marry young Montgomery, Lucy. (*Moves L. above table.*)

LUCY. He says he won't have me while I'm in the Syndicate.

STE. I'll get you out of that.

BAM. You can't do that, Verity. (*Moves to table R.*)

STE. Can't I? I will, though.

BAM. You'll upset the whole thing.

STE. I'll look after that.

(MAID *announces Mr. Alcorn. Enter* ALCORN;  
*exit* MAID R.)

STE. Ah! Got the letter, Alcorn?

ALCORN. Yes. I don't understand it.

STE. Just a moment. (*Opens door L. and calls.*)  
Smithson!

(*Enter* SMITHSON.)

WALTER. I'd better go.

STE. You've no need. You know so much about it you can stay and listen to the rest. (*Gets chair.*)

(STEPHEN *sits at head of table.* BAMFORD, SMITHSON,  
ALCORN *sit as in Act II.* LUCY *stands R.,* WALTER  
*sits below fire.*)

ALCORN. Well, gentlemen, he won't sell. (*Taking out letter.*)

STE. Refuses to sell? What does this mean?

SMITHS. (*to* BAMFORD). And you assured us he was broke.

BAM. So he was, absolutely broke. I don't understand it at all.

AL. No more do I. Listen to this. (*Reading letter.*) "I regret my inability to entertain the offer made by your company. I have reason to believe that owing to overcrowding the land is urgently wanted and that the town authorities wish to deal with the matter themselves. I am having the tennis lawns, etc., valued independently and the town may then purchase at the valuation. I shall, however, not disturb my old tenants in the Polygon, this letter

referring only to the open space now used as tennis lawns." Now what in thunder do you make of that?

STE. (*looking at WALTER*). You?

WALTER. A letter to Monte Carlo only costs tuppence-halfpenny.

BAM. But hang it, Verity, the town isn't buying.

STE. On the contrary, Sam, the town is. The overcrowding is a scandal. We must have some fresh air.

SMITHS. Oh, don't talk like a blooming philanthropist again.

STE. I'm talking like a blooming alderman.

AL. This isn't a town's meeting. It's a company meeting. Stick to company business.

STE. The company has no further business. The company is wound up.

BAM. Damned if it is. This letter doesn't end all. It's your fault, Verity. You shouldn't have gone to the Polygon. You over-reached yourself.

STE. This would still have happened, Sam, in any case.

BAM. I don't see it. Why?

STE. Mr. Montgomery can tell you.

BAM. Well, it's not all up. Let's have what he offers.

STE. He doesn't offer us anything. He offers it to the town.

AL. And the town must buy.

STE. The town shall buy.

BAM. Yes; well I said houses. Let's make it houses. Model dwellings as ugly as hell, for the Polygon toffs to look at every time they poke their noses out of doors.

STE. Don't be spiteful, Sam. We've had a licking, but don't bear malice.

WALTER. Thank you, Mr. Verity.

STE. Oh, I'd forgotten you were there. Oblige me by going into that room for two minutes. You can wait in there till we're through.

WALTER. But what have I to wait for? (*Rises.*)

STE. Sorry to occupy your valuable time, but you're going to wait. You'll find a fire.

(*Exit WALTER L.*)

That chap's wasted as a curate. (*Sits.*) He's beaten me! Me licked by a bricking curate!

AL. But I don't understand.

STE. Oh, he got hold of our company idea, told Sir Charles and smashed our plans. That's all. Nothing very serious. We're out of pocket for a few expenses that won't hurt any of us, and we've missed a good piece of plunder. Well, the thing to do now is to turn round and do the handsome over that recreation ground. *Our* idea for the benefit of the town! *My* negotiations with the Polygon! If we can't get cash by it, gentlemen, let us get credit.

SMITHS. And what about the rates?

STE. Well, what about them? More fresh air, less ill health. Less ill health, less poverty. Less poverty, fewer paupers. That recreation ground 'ull pay for itself in less than no time. If there's going to be any bargaining about the rates we'll raise the money by subscription, and for two pins I'll head the list myself.

AL. It's a queer finish to our plans.

STE. It is a finish, Alcorn. We're knocked out, and we've got to take it with a big, broad smile and nobody will even so much as guess we've meant anything but the square thing all the time.

BAM. That curate 'ull talk. Curates are always talking.

STE. No, he won't.

BAM. You can't stop an old woman gossiping. Gab's a parson's stock-in-trade.

STE. He's no old woman. He's a wideawake young man and he's going to marry my daughter—if she's free. That'll shut his mouth for him.

SMITHS. Well, we'll leave that to you, Verity.

STE. You can, safely.

AL. It's been a lot of trouble all for nothing.  
(*Rises; general rise.*)

STE. Well, we're good sportsmen, I hope, and the Carrington recreation ground 'ull be an everlasting monument to our civic enterprise and public spirit.

AL. Aye, I'm beginning to feel good already.

SMITHS. It's a disappointment, Verity. Ah, well, we can't win every time.

STE. No. Better luck next time. Good night, Smithson. (*Takes chair up stage.*)

SMITHS. Good night. Good night all.

AL. I'm coming your way.

SMITHS. Come along then. (*Crosses R.*)

AL. Good night.

(*Exeunt SMITHSON and ALCORN, R.*)

BAM. I'm glad they've gone. Something to put to you, Verity, private.

STE. About her?

BAM. Her? No. I've said my say about that, and you need her to shut the curate's mouth.

STE. I'll shut his mouth without that if you want her. It's a thousand a year, you know.

LUCY. The auction recommences, Mr. Bamford.

BAM. Don't fret yourself, Miss Verity. I'm not bidding. You've had my last word, Verity.

STE. Well, what's this you want to say?

BAM. About me being mayor. That stands, of course?

STE. No, it doesn't. (*Above table.*)

BAM. But—

STE. That was a contract made by a company that's wound up.

BAM. But, hang it, I'd counted on being mayor. I've mentioned it to one or two. (*Goes above table R.*)

STE. All right, then. There's your mayoress.

BAM. Is that the price?



STE. There's your mayoress.

LUCY. I won't be haggled over.

BAM. Miss Verity, it's not you. If I wanted to marry I dunno as I'd look an inch further. It's—I'm not the marrying sort and that's top and bottom of it.

STE. Sam, I'll be mayor myself if it's only for the fun of opening that recreation ground to the public and making a speech about the anxious negotiating the Council had to do before they brought off this great scheme and conferred an inestimable boon on the deserving working classes.

BAM. Oh, if you're putting up for mayor, I retire. I can't fight a man of your weight.

STE. Fight be hanged. We're good friends.

BAM. Aye. You've got your man in there.

STE. Well! (*Pause.*) Yes.

LUCY. It's very sweet of you not to want to marry me, Mr. Bamford.

BAM. Ask me to the wedding.

STE. Yes, you should be good for a thumping present after this.

BAM. I'll stand my corner. You've to tackle the curate. I'll be off.

STE. Good night.

LUCY. Good night, and thank you.

BAM. It's *me* that's thankful. Good night.

(*Exit BAMFORD. STEPHEN crosses to left door, opens it and calls.*)

STE. Now, Mr. Montgomery.

(*Enter WALTER. LUCY rises, L.*)

WALTER. Well, sir? (*Crosses to R. below table.*)

STE. (*c. above table*). Are you or are you not going to marry my daughter?

WALTER. That depends.

STE. I'll tell you something. The syndicate's bust. In fact, there never was a syndicate.

WALTER. You mustn't ask me to believe that, sir. You gave the thing away yourself.

STE. (*impressively*). There never was a syndicate. A limited company isn't a limited company till it's registered. We weren't registered. You understand? You can't go telling people about a syndicate that never existed.

WALTER (*smiling*). That sounds reasonable. I shan't tell.

STE. Yes. Well, what about my daughter?

WALTER. I thought you objected to me.

STE. I did. But I begin to think there's more in you than meets the eye.

WALTER. Thanks for the compliment.

STE. I do wish you weren't a curate, though. (*Crosses to fire.*) There's nothing in the Church for a smart man.

WALTER. There are plenty of prizes in the Church.

LUCY. And Walter's going to win them, father. (*Up to WALTER.*)

WALTER. Yes.

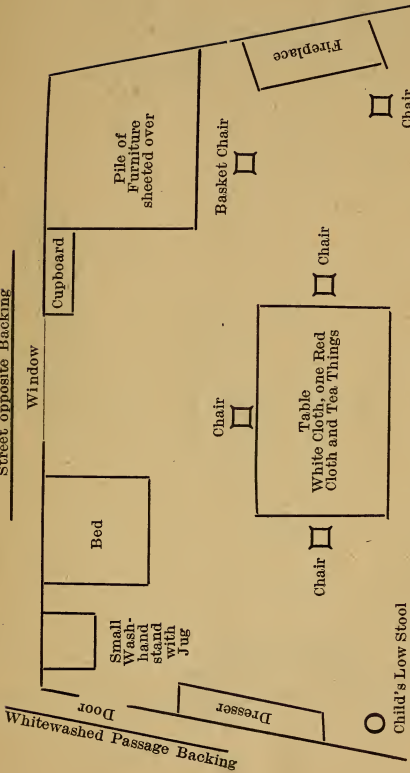
STE. He's not won much yet.

WALTER. This is all the prize I want, Mr. Verity. (*Takes her hand.*)

STE. She's not a bad start, either. You've got round me, and it takes a bit of doing. (*Crosses to WALTER.*) Look here, my lad, I come of a long lived stock and you'll disappoint me if I don't see you a bishop before I die. I'll come to the Palace, Lucy, and hang my hat up some day. (*Going to exit to leave them together.*)

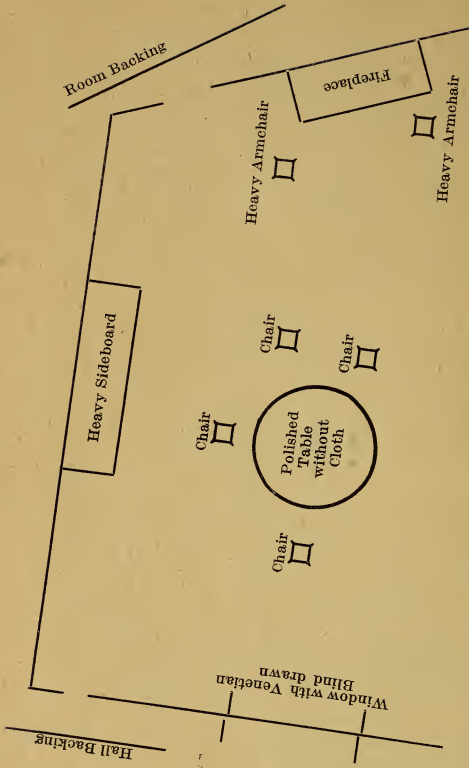
CURTAIN.

Street opposite Backing



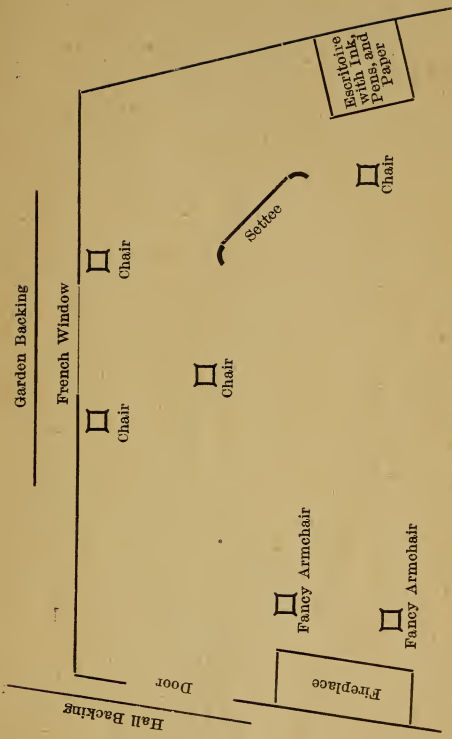
Wallpaper with large Flowered Design.  
Text on wall over Bed.  
Hearthrug.  
Tray on Dresser.  
Dick's hat on hook in door; also Jim's tie and "dicky."  
Jim's coat on Basket Chair.

ACT I.



Crimson Wallpaper.  
 Heavy Mahogany Furniture.  
 Pens and Ink on Sideboard.  
 Chandelier hangs over Table.

ACTS II. AND IV.



Walls panelled.  
 Carpet aspires to Aubusson.  
 Furniture in faded Tapestry.  
 Old-fashioned Chandelier.

ACT III.

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